THE

NINE DAYS' WONDER.

A Novel. 1083

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. MEEKE,

AUTHOR OF

THE OLD WIFE AND YOUNG HUSBAND, AMAZEMENT, &c. &c.

You have worth
Richly enamell'd with modesty.

RANDOLPH.

I see those who are lifted highest on
The hill of Honour, are nearest to the
Blasts of envious Fortune.

FORD.

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THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASVATI MAHAL.
1083

THE

NINE DAYS' WONDER.

CHAP. I.

WE shall not pretend to enter into a minute description of the anxiety and agitation which now prevailed among this numerous assembly; the candidates and other gentlemen having retreated, that they might no longer impede the election. Had many of the lower class been at that early hour in the very high spirits they made it a point of being in by noon, it is

a chance if they had not immediately, and not in the most lawful manner, begun their researches after the stray sheep, as some of them openly declared their intention of so doing before sunset.

The Mayor warned them against breaking the peace; giving them to understand they could not proceed to action, except seconded by his authority, and a warrant for that purpose; which he was, notwithstanding his caution, very ready to grant, if they had any reason to suppose the young Duke was any where concealed within his jurisdiction.

"These were not times for standing upon such forms," some of his own party observed. "This was no trifling matter; and for the honour of ——, they ought not to rest till they had discovered what had become of the young Duke;" declaring that they had some notion of beginning their

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their search in Mr. Milford's house and warehouses.

Such a threat, and with such a surmise attached to it, induced Mr. Milford to come forward, professing himself ready to attend the Duke de L'Infantado, or any of the young Duke's friends, over every room in his house, and to every likely place for him to be concealed upon his premises; declaring his astonishment at any one daring to suspect that either he or his son was any way concerned in the young gentleman's departure, which appeared as great an enigma to them as it could possibly be to any other person present: while the merchant's friends defied any man to impeach the honour or integrity of Mr. Milford.

The Colonel blustered still more, professing his intention of punishing whoever dared to utter any thing derogatory to his honour.

"Your honour!" bawled a sailor. "Yes, yes, your late mode of fighting has convinced us you need to boast of that as well as of your courage; though I mean no offence to my old master—God bless him!"

Another desired the poll might begin; then they would see about finding the young gentleman. Some observed, the Colonel was not chosen yet, with all his bluster. In short, a continued murmur and confusion seemed to prevail among the mob. Though each party was unwilling to hear what the other had to say, yet they all agreed it was devilish odd, that the young gemman had been, as it appeared, spirited away, no one knew whither; and, notwithstanding the various attempts that were made, a considerable time elapsed before any degree of silence or order could be obtained; till the mutitude by degrees became more anxious respecting the election, which most people presumed would be

be decided in the Colonel's favour :—for, notwithstanding the distanced member had joined his opponents, that gentleman's force was too much spent, to render the junction of any importance; and it was supposed that a couple of hours would bring the business to a conclusion. As there would then be some time to sunset, those most eager to earn the large bribe which was held forth as an incitement to their cupidity, resolved to suspend the meditated search till after their curiosity had been gratified.

The poll was therefore opened; but one person only had taken the oath, and given his vote for Colonel Milford, to the great triumph of his party, who seemed to consider his election as secure, and gave a loose to their joy by repeated shouts of pleasure, when a servant rode up to the front of the hustings, and called out for Dr. ——.

This worthy and excellent physician was standing very near the Marquis of Stanmore; who, upon looking round when he replied—"I am coming," recognised in the messenger one of Lady Ossulston's servants.

"Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed, "what has happened? Send the man to me this moment, Doctor!"

His friends requested him not to be alarmed; while the medical gentleman, having pressed forward, and heard what the man had to say, mounted his horse, and rode off full speed, sending the messenger to explain why he had been thus suddenly summoned, to Lord Stanmore; whose alarm increased very considerably, upon learning that her Ladyship was supposed by her household to be dying, when the man came off, and made him determine to accompany him home immediately, giving his orders in consequence. But while

while his Lordship was making excuses to the noble Spaniard for thus abruptly leaving him among comparative strangers, and promising to return as speedily as the case would admit, a postchaise and four drove up the principal street in front of the hustings, as hard as the horses could lay their legs to the ground, and in a very few seconds it stopped just without the crowd; and, to the increasing astonishment of the alarmed Peer, displayed the widow's lozenge which ornamented Lady Ossulston's postchaise. But his first surprise was succeeded by a second he thought far more agreeable; for the moment the door was opened, out jumped our hero in apparent health and spirits; nor did his fair companions, Lady Ossulston and Miss Deloraine, seem at all in need of the so hastily summoned Doctor, who had returned with the carriage, and appeared to participate in the joy and triumph which beamed in the expressive eyes of the young widow; while,

while, waving his hat, he cried, in the style of the moment—"He comes, he comes, the hero comes!"

The crowd caught and repeated the words, making way on all sides; though many of them swore "it was all a fudge, and that this stranger was not the Marquis Almaviva." Nor were their doubts unnatural; for he certainly did not look very much like the ever elegant, though plainly dressed gentleman they had been accustomed to see. His hands and face being all that was clean about him, he was therefore not unaptly compared, by some of the Colonel's mob, to a man who had broke out of prison, or who had escaped from the Hulks after a long confinement, during which he had neither been allowed a change of clothes or linen.

He had not, however, advanced many steps, before he was recognised by his enraptured uncle, who pressed eagerly forward, and caught

caught him in his arms, to his infinite astonishment, not having entertained an idea of meeting the Spanish Prime Minister at ——.

Regardless, however, of his dirty appearance, the Duke de L'Infantado pressed him to his heart; his late unexpected, and as yet unaccounted-for absence having rendered him, if possible, dearer to him than ever. Tears of joy accompanied his repeated welcomes; nor could he prevail upon himself for some time to make way for our hero's other friends, who were scarcely less eager to express their satisfaction.

The Marquis of Stanmore was the most perplexed, as Ferdinand's very unexpected return, and his being brought back, as it were, by his niece, at the very moment he had been informed she was dangerously ill, puzzled him exceedingly; and as if to prolong his anxiety, that lady had

no sooner seen the Marquis locked in his uncle's arms, than, in consequence of her orders, her postillions took the road to Wildham's. His Lordship was therefore obliged to have recourse to patience; though he made no doubt of this apparent mystery being soon cleared up by our hero, whose return had put a complete stop to the poll, and appeared to have occasioned a sort of general satisfaction, though his dirty, disordered appearance excited as much amazement.

"Where could the two young ladies have found him!" some wondered; while those who had hoped to have been able to claim the large reward which they presumed had now fallen to their share, observed, that money always fell to the share of those who did not want it. Others remarked, that from the distance they had come, to judge by the horses, his Lordship had not been found upon Mr. Milford's premises; so they might have searched

searched there till doomsday, without being rewarded for their trouble.

The Merchant was no more inclined than his mob to suffer this circumstance to escape general notice; therefore, while the young Spaniard was receiving the congratulations of the majority of those present, and being gratified by hearing many people return thanks aloud to the Throne of Mercy for having permitted him to return in safety, that gentleman chose to address the multitude descanting upon the injury that had been done his character by those who had avowedly suspected him of having concealed the young Duke; declaring that no one rejoiced more than himself at that Nobleman's opportune return, as he made no doubt of his publicly exonerating him from being at all concerned in his late absence.

He was, however, but little attended to, so anxious were the crowd to catch every

word that fell from our hero's lips; who only required to be seen by the now admiring multitude (his uncle's story having prepossessed every heart in his favour, it having so completely exculpated him from having wilfully neglected his mother), to be idolized even by those most in the Milford interest, to which they knew, for the reasons already explained, he was not attached.

The Colonel, it was observed, did not appear near so well satisfied as his father, and he alone chose to remain silent. This, considering the terms upon which the Ambassador and himself parted, was not so much to be wondered at; but it was also remarked that he looked every where but at this favoured mortal, of whose very superior rank and immense fortune he could no longer pretend to doubt.

Lady Ossulston had long been his aversion; nevertheless, he felt his hatred towards

towards her increased by her recent officiousness: and we must acknowledge that it was very provoking to have the man he considered as his greatest enemy, brought back at such a very critical moment, just as his uncle, too, had thought proper to refute every report in circulation to his prejudice. Two hours later, and he should have seen him return with comparative satisfaction; for by that time he hoped to have been nominated Member for —— : therefore might have looked down upon him with scorn from his triumphal car, which was already prepared to convey him round the town; and, as it was, he began to have his doubts whether his friends might not waver; and when he saw the dirty figure, as he would, had he dared, have called our hero, stepping forward upon the hustings to address the multitude, he peevishly exclaimed—

"If we are to be thus continually inter-

interrupted by strangers, the poll will not be closed to-day."

He was not, however, seconded, as he expected; indeed, the populace were by no means averse to having the election protracted: in addition to which, they were exceedingly curious to hear our hero's strange absence somehow accounted for. They therefore exclaimed, nearly one and all—

"Let us hear what our noble townsman has to say first, Colonel!"

Ferdinand bowed, with his accustomed grace, in return for this kind wish; assuring the assembly that he did not mean to trespass many minutes upon their patience, though he felt very anxious to exculpate himself from having intentionally deserted his kind friends (whose cause he had prepared himself to support) at so critical a juncture.

"My

"My kind uncle," he proceeded, "informs me that he has just been giving you a short abstract of my life; it therefore only remains for me to account to you for my late strange disappearance, and for my present unseemly *dishabille*. I shall then leave you, my fellow-citizens, to form your own conjectures respecting this hitherto mysterious business; merely observing, that I am resolved, even should the attempt cost me my life—and my secret enemies have convinced me that is not improbable—to bring whoever inveigled me away, doubtless for the basest of purposes, to justice My official character will enable me to request the assistance of the British Legislature in my researches; and as there are four people, to my certain knowledge, concerned in this iniquitous plot. I entertain little doubt of getting to the bottom of it: and I now declare that if any one of them will step forward, and make a voluntary confession, I will give him one thousand pounds, and promise him,

him, besides, an unconditional pardon. There is a person whom I suspect to be the principal in this business; but I should be very sorry to make so free with any gentleman's character, as many people have not scrupled to do with mine during my involuntary absence, without a better foundation than mere suspicion."

The Duke paused, and looked round him with an enquiring eye; but as no one advanced, he continued—

"Possibly the reward I offered, particularly after the liberal pecuniary temptations my uncle has so lately held forth, may be deemed too inconsiderable; or possibly those to whom I allude, may hope to be better paid by holding their tongues. Before, however, I offer any larger bribe, I shall inform every one present how I came to suffer myself to be overpowered by my enemies. This note," producing one, "induced me to leave my

my mother and friend between eleven and twelve on the last evening I spent in ——"

"Read it—read it!" was the general cry.

He immediately complied with their request, reading aloud as follows:—

"My Lord Marquis, if I was not in the greatest distress, I should not make so bold as to address you; but in your charity alone have I any hopes: and if you will be so kind as to follow the bearer, I shall be able to convince you that I have not exaggerated the misfortunes which have unexpectedly befallen your much-obliged and ever grateful

"WILLIAM MUNFORD."

"What!

"What! Captain Will Munford!" was the general cry, particularly among the sailors. "Why, sure he was not concerned in any wickedness?"

"Why, he has been ready to hang himself more than once out of pure regard for your Lordship!" swore a sailor. "So please to come forward, and speak for yourself, Captain."

He did not, however, happen to be present; but there were plenty of people ready to go in search of him, who vowed they would soon bring him, dead or alive, to answer for himself.

The Duke was, notwithstanding, requested to proceed with his narrative.

"I readily accompanied the messenger, being very anxious to relieve the necessities of so worthy a man, of whom I had a very good opinion; and I am still much inclined to believe him innocent of

of any wish to deceive me; for he must be the basest of wretches, if he has entered into so abominable a conspiracy. But to proceed.

"I was suffered to reach the turning leading to his house; but there I was seized by three men, one of whom had followed me from home, and who gave the signal for the assault, by whistling a moment before: but as the town was in one continued bustle and confusion, I took no notice, till I was told I was arrested in the King's name, and was desired to accompany these ruffians to the regulating Captain. I attempted to remonstrate; but they would not listen to me, affecting to be part of the pressgang then busily employed in procuring men for his Majesty's service. I therefore accompanied them without making any further resistance, not doubting but I should be liberated the moment I made myself known to that officer; but when I found we were taking

a con-

a contrary road to the one that led to his house, I refused to proceed, telling them I knew where that gentleman lived, and to him I insisted upon being taken. They then said he was on board the Tender; and thither I refused to accompany them, telling them who I really was, and threatening them with the consequences of their unprovoked assault: but they would scarcely suffer me to speak, swearing that I was Tom Richards, whom they had been in search of for a week or more.

As, during the bustle, several sailors had been picked up, who, for the sake of getting drunk at free cost, had after dusk emerged from their hiding-places, I thought it possible that they might suppose I was this marked sailor in disguise, for I wore a blue frock, the same I have on now, which was, as you may perceive, once of that colour; but the men's invincible obstinacy, and absolute refusal to hear any thing I had to say, convinced

me

me at last, that if they actually did belong to the pressgang, they had been employed to decoy me away for some sinister purpose. I therefore made all the resistance in my power, struggling as vehemently as I could, to get away from them; but receiving several blows about the head with bludgeons, I was at last overpowered, and dragged to the water's edge, where a boat was stationed, in which some of the real pressgang were evidently waiting for me, having several other men handcuffed and bound, already in custody. I had therefore no alternative but to suffer them to put me quietly on board the Tender, where I hoped to obtain a hearing, and of course my discharge; not that I supposed the Regulating Captain was on board: though I thought it possible, as I had heard, several days before, that the Tender, having obtained its full complement of pressed men, was going round to Portsmouth with the first fair wind, which happened to blow on this very evening. But I was not fortunate

enough

enough to meet with any one on board, at all likely to afford me any redress; for the only officer I saw, was so much in liquor, that he was obliged to be supported: and when he attempted to speak, he was scarcely intelligible, though he made shift to articulate, as we were being forced on board—' Down with them! down with them!—let me have none of the rascal's jaw!"

" So I was, among the rest, crammed into the hold below, where the crowd was already too great to permit us to breathe freely. I had frequently, in former times, heard that there were wretches hired to procure men for the service of the King; but could one of the best of Sovereigns know how grossly they abuse the power with which they are entrusted, I am well convinced that some more humane mode of manning the ships of war, would be immediately adopted; and there are many methods which might be put in practice, against which, I am convinced, no true British

British Tar would murmur. But I am strangely wandering from my subject.

"Being very soon locked down, I had no recourse but patience; hoping, like some of my companions, that in the morning we should be allowed a little fresh air, and obtain a hearing. Indeed I should have been comparatively easy, could I have informed my mother what had befallen me; but I was assured that I might as well think of sending to the Pope of Rome to come and liberate me, as to hope I should be allowed to send any message on shore: and by daybreak next morning, some of my companions declared the ship was under weigh. I then told them who I really was; how I had been deluded from home; and, finally, forced on board, in hopes they would join me in insisting upon the commander coming down.

"This

"This they very readily did; but it proved of no avail, as we were merely threatened to be put in irons, in reply to our remonstrances, and to be brought up to the gangway if we made any further disturbance.

"In this uncomfortable situation we therefore remained till noon, when some refreshments were brought us by several sailors, who seemed to have lost all sense of feeling for their fellow-creatures; rather appearing to enjoy our sufferings, than to entertain any wish to render our miserable dungeon more comfortable. To have endeavoured to awaken their compassion, would have been a very fruitless attempt; I therefore gave up all hopes of being liberated before we reached Portsmouth, whither I understood we were bound; and in consequence, prayed very heartily for a fair wind to carry us thither: but, unfortunately, it soon changed, and became very rough, which obliged us for three days

days to lie beating off this coast, we, poor devils, in close confinement the whole time; and if ever I asked for the commanding officer, I was only laughed at, or told he had something else to do than to be waiting upon us. In a short time I was convinced they spoke no more than the truth; for a most violent gale sprung up, as you probably all remember, on the fourth morning, at which time, I understood we lay off Yarmouth; but, like many more, having parted our anchor, we were forced out to sea.

"I cannot say that I was absolutely aware of our danger till the majority of my companions swore the old hulk would not weather it long, if so be the wind continued at its present rate; thus foreseeing that all our troubles were drawing to a speedy conclusion. I had, like them, heard several violent crashes, for which they accounted not in the most satisfactory manner to a person by no means

 inclined

inclined to consider his existence a burthen: and at last I was but too well convinced of the justice of their surmises; for the hatches were unlocked, and we were told that we might come upon deck, if we wished to see our danger, or chose to assist in trying to save our lives.

"Never before did I witness so dreadful a scene as now presented itself to my eyes; the ship, literally a wreck (all her masts and standing rigging having gone by the board), was left to the mercy of the wind and waves, as all the sailors, two old men excepted, were drunk, and rolling about the deck.

"The Dutch coast was in sight; but it was impossible for any boats to put off to our assistance, said my companions, who declared that nothing could be done with such a log as the ship was become, but to let her drive wherever chance directed. Four other vessels were in sight,

sight, and even in greater danger than ourselves, for they were nearer the land; and one of them, which I saw strike upon a sunken rock, I was assured was from this port. The crew, or at least a part of them, took to their boats; but whether they escaped the fury of the wind and waves, I cannot take upon me to say."

Here he was interrupted by several people calling out—

"That was the Robert, belonging to Mr. Milford. Some of the crew came home a day or two ago; only two men perished."

"I am happy to hear so," rejoined Ferdinand, "and am convinced that Mr. Milford deems his loss comparatively trifling, since his men were saved. I hope they have not been pressed since their return?"

"They have not, your Grace," said old Milford, anxious now to make every atonement in his power for his past incivility towards this great man; "and the pressgang have assured me they will not lay hands upon them, since they have had such a narrow escape. But pray proceed with your story; I long to hear by what miracle you were preserved in an hour of such danger."

So said the generality of those present, after a momentary pause; during which, our hero drank a tumbler of Madeira, which Mr. Fenwick, thinking he appeared rather exhausted, had almost forced upon him, when he continued as follows:—

"About half an hour after we had seen the Robert strike, a man, who had gone below to examine the pumps, called out that the ship was sinking very fast, for the water in the hold gained upon them every moment.

"Self-

"Self-preservation now predominated in every bosom, though all agreed there was very little chance of any of us reaching the shore. The large boat was, however, hoisted over the side; but so many instantly leaped into it, that she went down in a few minutes.

"An old sailor from this port, and who was perfectly sober, after some time, recognised me, dirty and shabby as I appeared when I emerged from my prison; and after calling down vengeance on the heads of those who had decoyed me on board, he advised me to stand by him and his comrade, who was also sober, and to seize upon the small boat, which they would undertake to navigate if I would assist in gaining possession of it, which I very readily promised; for while there remained a chance of saving our lives, I thought it my duty to make every exertion. Therefore, seizing the boat by main

force, we launched her, and instantly got into her; and, I am sorry to add, that, after permitting two more to join us, who had been my companions in captivity, and had wives and families, we were compelled, (for they all swore we should not have the slightest chance if we admitted any more), to row away with all our might, to get clear of the ship, which went down about ten minutes after we had quitted her, with God knows how many miserable beings on board. But, thanks to the Great Ruler of the wind and waves, and the skill of the old sailors, we reached in safety a creek in the Dutch coast, where we landed late in the evening. We had, however, no sooner recruited our strength, than we agreed to venture once more upon that element which had so lately proved the grave of many of our fellow-creatures, and from whose fury we had so narrowly escaped. I therefore, three days ago, hired a fishing-boat to convey us to this port; but, owing to a calm when we left Holland,

Holland, and to a contrary breeze this morning, we were unable to come in with the tide: however, the old sailors, my guardian angels, as I style them, pointed out a spot a few miles above, where we might be landed with safety.

"We had nearly reached the place, where he advised the master to cast anchor, when we passed a small boat rowed by two men, in which were four ladies; whom, having viewed through the skipper's glass, I fancied their features were familiar to me: therefore, when we got into the boat to come on shore, as it was not much out of the way, I proposed rowing towards them, perceiving the men were resting upon their oars, and that the ladies were busily employed in fishing; and I seldom experienced a more agreeable surprise, than in thus unexpectedly meeting with the two ladies who did me the honour to set me down about half an hour ago. The alarm which preceded our

arrival, was owing to a mistake, which has been explained to Dr. ——.

"And now having brought my narrative down to the present moment, I request, fellow-citizens, you would advise me how to proceed, to discover these my secret enemies. My good friends, the sailors, who returned with me, did not know I was on board the Tender till they recognised me; therefore could give me no intelligence likely to answer the desired end. To you, my generous townsmen, in consequence, I appeal; as I am sure you will assist me in bringing the culprits to justice."

The news of the Tender having gone down, and of every soul on board her having perished, had been brought to —— by Mr. Milford's sailors; and many a bitter execration had been bestowed upon pressgangs and their employers, several poor families having relations on board

her:

her: but it had never entered the heads of any of our hero's friends, that he was among the sufferers. It therefore may well be said, who shall scrutinize the immutable decrees of Him who orders every thing for the best?

The Duke appearing to wait for an answer to his last speech, many longed to declare whom they suspected to have been the principal agent in this iniquitous scheme, but were withheld by fear from speaking their sentiments, though many a reproachful glance was directed towards the hitherto most successful candidate, which did not escape that gentleman's notice; who, fancying also that our hero rather suspected (from some hints which he had dropped during his recital) that he was concerned in the plot which had so nearly proved fatal to him, he was preparing to vindicate his fame, when some of those who had been in search of Captain Munford, returned, saying that

his wife had told them he was gone out of town, but that she expected him home again in an hour.

"This has a bad appearance," remarked some of the crowd; and several offered to set off after him, not doubting but that they should secure the promised reward, if they were able to meet with him, and bring him back. The Colonel having, however, seized the opportunity to assert his innocence, they wanted to hear what he had to say before they set off; but he spoke very little to the purpose, merely presuming no one conceived him guilty, and hinting his wishes that the poll might once more be opened.

In this he was opposed by those who liked to clear their way as they went, again repeating there was still a long while before night.

Changing his tone in consequence of this

this intimation, the Colonel, though hitherto unaccused, entered upon his defence, protesting that, notwithstanding the various malicious hints which might be thrown out against him, he should as soon have thought of having his father conveyed on board the Tender, as the Duke of Medina Sidonia. He was no fool; therefore must be well aware of what might be the consequence of such a breach of the peace, and of the law of nations. He was aware of the power vested in an Ambassador; therefore, since he had not absolutely taken leave of his senses, he presumed the sensible part of the community must, without hesitation, acquit him of having been guilty of so base an action, evidently to answer no purpose, and which might endanger the lives of the perpetrators.

While he was thus eloquently descanting upon the utter impossibility of his having been concerned in this strange

adventure, our hero observed two men advancing towards the hustings, who appeared, to judge from their looks, to have been just roused from sleeping off their last night's debauch.

As they drew near, he surveyed them very anxiously; till every one, being more or less intently gazing upon him, the eyes of the crowd followed the direction of his, and a sailor called out—

"Those are two of your fellow-sufferers, my Lord Marquis, who were, like you, fortunate enough to reach the coast of Holland. They were on board the Robert, and are suffered to be at large by the pressgang, because they were so near being swamped."

"I thought I had seen them before," replied Ferdinand. "Pray, my good friends, make way, and desire them to advance."

"Here, come forward, you Sirs!" said one

one of Mr. Milford's Captains; "my Lord Duke wishes to speak to you."

After staring for some seconds at our hero, one of them looked very much surprised, and appeared unwilling to obey the summons; till some of his brother Tars, thinking his reluctance was either owing to stupidity or sheepishness, soon, as they termed it, bundled him through the crowd to the place where the Duke was standing. As he was being thus assisted forward, Mr. Milford said—

"There never were two better sailors, your Grace, nor two more drunken fellows! I kept them concealed for six weeks before I sent them on board the Robert; which, as you have heard—nay, seen, was wrecked at the time the Tender was lost; and I have my doubts whether it was not partly owing to those sots being in liquor, which is mostly the case if they can get at any: for she was a stout, fine

ship,

ship, and as able to weather the storm as any of those which escaped. As for the old hulk of a Tender, I only wonder she kept the sea so long as she did.—Why don't you come along, you Sirs, and answer any questions his Grace may chuse to ask you respecting the dreadful storm you weathered together!—No offence, my Lord Duke; for I am sure no one rejoices more than myself at your miraculous escape."

But just as they had reached the hustings, the Colonel called to them that he wanted to say three words to them. He was, however, silenced by his more polite father, who eagerly said—

"Recollect, Robert, that the Duke de Medina called them first, and that you owe civility to your superior. You can have nothing of moment to say to them, or that cannot be delayed till his Grace is satisfied."

"Bravo,

"Bravo, my old master! bravo!" was repeated by some of the Tars, and every one seemed better pleased with the father's, than the son's conduct. The Duke had merely asked the man a trifling question, though leading to others of more importance, when he was interrupted by a general cry of—

"Here he comes! here he comes!—make way there!—Why, Captain Munford, where the devil have you been?" asked several sailors at once. "Why you had like to have been cast and condemned without having had a hearing."

The Captain was too much out of breath to reply; but with his eyes fixed upon our hero, he bustled through the mob, and when near enough, begged pardon for not having come the moment he was sent for, adding—

"I had a little business at Mitcham this

this morning; that is, I have a little boy there at nurse, who is not very well, and I have been over to see how he was, expecting to be back before the poll began, though I little hoped I had so agreeable a surprise in store for me; but I have learned from my wife, that I am suspected of having had a hand in spiriting your Lordship away, which is as false as God is true. However, here I am to answer for myself; and if I have done any thing that an honest man need to be ashamed of, or have been concerned in any plot, particularly against him, for whom I am bound to pray every night and morning as long as I live, why cut out my tongue, my Lord Marquis, and chop off my right hand, to prevent me from ever being guilty of the like again. That is all I can say; so pray, my Lord, let me know of what I stand accused."

A general shout of applause succeeded his speech, and many were ready to swear

that

that Captain Munford had not done any thing which he ought to blush for.

"I am well convinced that he never did, my good friends!" rejoined our hero; "and I trust you will do me the justice to believe me, Captain, when I assure you, that my heart has all along acquitted you of having been accessary nearly to my death; but somebody has made very free with your name, since this note enticed me from home, and gave my enemies an opportunity of forcing me on board the Tender, whence I narrowly escaped with my life!" presenting the letter to the petrified Captain, who listened with horror to this very summary account of his Grace's late sufferings.

Having examined the note, he passionately exclaimed—

"D—mn—t—n seize the dog, whoever wrote it! No, no, my Lord, it is not my

my hand-writing, nor any thing like it; and I would turn hangman myself, to be revenged of the villain who has so basely rendered my name subservient to his wicked purposes!" pulling out his pocket book, which he presented to Ferdinand, requesting that he would examine the contents, which were his writing, in order that he might see how materially it differed from that in the note; and then taking a pen out of the clerk's hand, he wrote his name under the forged signature in the billet, as a farther proof of his innocence.

"I was perfectly convinced in my own mind, Captain," said our hero, "that you were incapable of so base an action, before you thus clearly proved it. How much I should have wronged you, had I condemned you unheard, much as appearances were against you! But can you guess who was so obliging as to become your representative, or rather secretary, upon this occasion?"

The

The Captain, either purposely or accidentally, fixed his eyes upon Colonel Milford, when, rapping out a great oath, he exclaimed—

"If I were to judge from a person's looks, I should swear it was my young master there!"

"Scoundrel!" retorted the insulted, enraged fop, who evidently trembled with passion, while he vowed that he would make him remember thus publicly traducing his character.

"Nay, you need not put yourself in such a passion, Colonel! I did not affirm that you wrote my name instead of your own; nor can a man be always accountable for his looks: though, mark me, I despise your threats! I like my old master there, very well. He and I never had a mis-word yet; but neither you, nor any man, shall prevent me from speaking my thoughts, when my character is at stake: and if you are for having satis-

satisfaction in an honourable way, why you will always find me ready, either to fight, box, or cudgel with you, as you may prefer either of the latter, to making use of more dangerous weapons. You may, perhaps, revenge yourself for my plain dealing, by getting me out of your father's employ; but there are more merchants than one in ——, and, even if I should not get a ship here, I know where I can have one to-morrow; so that for you, my dandy!" snapping his fingers, in derision.

While the brave Tar was thus furiously holding forth, with his face nearly of the colour of his scarlet waistcoat, several people observed that Colonel Milford looked as pale as a maggot. Milford was both shocked and confused at what he was in a manner compelled to listen to; but the moment that he could obtain a hearing, he stepped forward, vowing that his son's character should not be thus publicly traduced

traduced with impunity, if it cost him every shilling that he was worth to punish his accusers, and to prove his innocence.

"No one has said that he was guilty, yet, Sir," replied the Captain; "but supposing him to be so, what would you do then?"

"Disown him for my son!" was the answer; "and is there a man present who can say Robert Milford ever forfeited his word?"

Lord Stanmore declared that he had ever entertained the highest opinion of his integrity. So said our hero, the Baronet, and Mr. Fenwick.

The Merchant was much flattered, and returned his thanks very politely for this public testimony of their regard, acknowledging that he had been greatly to blame in doubting for one moment the

Duke

Duke de Medina's noble origin; but as to having, either directly or indirectly, conspired against his liberty, he declared that so base an idea would never have entered his head.

The Colonel spoke to the same effect, but in so low a voice, and with such visible confusion, that even those who were nearest to him, could but very imperfectly hear what he had to say; and they ceased to listen to him, upon our hero once more beginning to question the two men before him.

"Have you heard, my friend," addressing the one, whose features he fancied were familiar to him, "that there has been a very large reward offered to any one who could inform my uncle, any of these gentlemen present, or myself, who brought this note to me late in the evening of last Tuesday week? Look at it, as it

it may assist your recollection;" giving it to the fellow, folded up as he had received it.

"I never heard a word of the reward you mention, my Lord; did you, John Jefferies?"

"No; this is the first inkling I ever had of the matter. How much might be offered, an' please your Honour? I am sure, if we knew how to lay hold of a good round sum, we should be ready enough to set our wits to work; for God knows we are poor enough."

"Those men, your Grace," interrupted the Merchant, "were on board the Robert at the time you were spirited away, and she sailed with the Tender."

"Are you sure they were on ship-board at the time you allude to, Mr. Milford?" asked Ferdinand.

"I have hitherto believed they were so, your Grace; at least, I was so assured by some of my people, on whose word I place great dependance. They were concealed,

cealed, as you have already heard, with some others; but were put on board at dusk the night before they sailed."

"Then it is by no means impossible that I may still be right in my conjectures, Mr. Milford. I will therefore, with your leave, put a few more questions to these men."

"You have my free permission, your Grace; I only spoke to save trouble."

Turning to the sailors, the Duke continued—

"You expressed a wish, my friends, to know what precise sum was offered to whoever could satisfy me respecting the person who brought me that note. Possibly, some of those around you have already told you, it was a thousand pounds that I offered."

"And I will make it five!" exclaimed the Duke de L'Infantado; "nay, I have already offered double that sum, but that

was

was before my nephew was restored to my arms. However, I am so resolutely bent upon punishing the principals concerned in this iniquitous transaction, that I here swear to make it twenty, if any one will instantly relieve me from my present state of suspense; as I shall never fancy my nephew in safety till I have fathomed this infernal plot, which had so nearly terminated his existence."

"Twenty thousand pounds!" exclaimed one of the sailors, casting a wistful look at Colonel Milford, which did not pass unobserved.

He paused. The eyes of the whole assembly were fixed upon him. At last, he said—

"I only wish I could satisfy your Grace; for I will swear I should have no objection to handle the money!"

"Then you cannot give me any information respecting the person who

brought me this billet?" asked our hero, looking him full in the face.

"Not at present, my Lord! though you may depend upon my using my best endeavours to deserve the reward."

"I do not doubt it; but I would have you recollect that you will not be entitled to it, should I make the discovery I am so bent upon doing, through any other means."

"Why no, that stands to reason, my Lord; but a man must be a fool, indeed, to say any thing, even to make his fortune, that might lead him to the gallows! because twenty thousand pounds might not be of much service to him in the other world;" leering, rather than looking towards the Colonel, who affected to smile applause, which induced the sailor to swear "he knew nothing respecting the note at present."

So said John Jefferies, adding—"We were both on board the Robert by nine o'clock,

o'clock, so it an't very likely the reward should fall to our share."

"I will swear I saw you, John Jefferies," cried another sailor, "after ten; for I have been reflecting, and I can bring proof, if required, that you and Sam Thomas were standing together under the dead wall leading to the churchyard, when Will Jenkins and I were going by, and we both knew you, first by your voices, and then by your looks, as we passed you, for all you were standing with your backs towards us."

This serious charge disconcerted John Jefferies for a few seconds; but, rallying his spirits, he swore that it had not gone nine by the Church clock, when they were standing under the dead wall; and they were then going on board, and had only stopped to consider whether they might venture to go to the Anchor, to have a quart of ale, before they went down to the slip.

These contradictory accounts, added to Sam Thomas's having half acknowledged that he was in the secret, though his fears for his neck kept him silent, occasioned a general murmur. They were known to be two drunken audacious fellows, and some people now accused them point blank of having personated the pressgang, to force my Lord Duke on board the Tender; while the accused, as their case became *more desperate*, *were more positive* in their declarations of innocence.

"Well, well," cried Captain Munford, "it will be an easy matter to prove whether you were on shore at the time 'tis suspected. The men who put you on board must be forthcoming; and Charles Knight and Will Jenkins will prove what the former offers to swear: thus one thing will lead to another, and in time we shall get at the truth. So to begin, please to tell us who put you on board?"

"Our

"Our own men, in our ship's boat. Old Tom Nelson and the two boys are still in Holland with the Captain; I only wish they were here, they would soon vouch for the truth of all we have said."

As the Duke was standing over the two men, he being upon the hustings, and they below, he had been observed to stoop several times, to examine some part of their dress, and he now asked—

"Pray, my friend, did you lose all your baggage when the ship struck?"

"Every rag, my Lord!" was the answer.

"And pray, did you ever, from the time you went on board, change your shirt?"

The man seemed to be puzzled by what appeared to every one so strange a question, and first said—"No;" then "Yes; he hardly recollected."

 "Well,

"Well, be so good as to unbutton your jacket; for, if you be the man I suspect, you have lost a part of your shirt, if you have not changed it since the time I allude to. For you must know, good people, that during the scuffle I had with the pretended pressgang, in aiming at the collar of one of their jackets, to fling them from me, I missed my hold, but caught him by the shirt, his bosom being open; by which means I became master of this shirt-buckle and this piece of check (pulling both out of his pocket), which I held very fast, in hopes they might one day lead to the detection of the ruffians."

Sam Thomas's looks, while listening to our hero, were alone sufficient to stamp him guilty in the opinion of the whole assembly, as he was evidently too much terrified to think of unbuttoning his jacket; but Captain Munford, having taken the buckle and piece of check from his

his Grace, instantly seized the supposed culprit—

"I will be your valley de sham this turn, you d——d dog! for I know you used to wear one of these things."

The frightened sailor fell upon his knees, before the Captain could satisfy the general curiosity, and begged for mercy, vowing, "if he was but promised his life, he would submit to transportation, and would make an open confession."

It would be useless to repeat the threats and execrations which were bestowed upon him by an irritated mob. Our hero requested that they would suspend their judgment till they heard what the culprit had to say in his own defence; as he considered his employers, if such people there were, as far more guilty than the poor wretch whom they had doubtless

bribed very high, to execute their vile plot.

"Sam Thomas was a known villain, though an excellent sailor," some of the crowd declared; "and, had he met with his deserts, he would have been hanged long since."

"That may be," rejoined the Duke; "I therefore hope you will allow him time for repentance!" And, for fear they should proceed to handle him rather roughly, the Marquis of Stanmore proposed that he should get upon the hustings, to make his confession, observing, "by that means he would be much better heard."

The terrified wretch was therefore soon raised from his humble posture by Captain Munford, who assisted in hoisting him upon the platform; where he would have again kneeled for mercy, if the Marquis of

of Stanmore had not told him to stand up, and speak boldly, as his life depended upon his sincerity.

While the surrounding multitude were hoping that the rogue would be hanged, and, like Captain Munford, readily offering to turn Jack Ketch upon the occasion, the trembling sinner looked as if he were already at the fatal tree; but, after hoping that our hero would be graciously pleased to save his life, he swore that he would tell them all the truth, as he hoped for mercy!

Ferdinand promised, as far as it depended upon him, a free pardon, upon these conditions; and he began, as we shall relate in our next chapter.

CHAP. II.

TURNING his ghastly countenance full upon Colonel Milford, who appeared to wish himself any where but upon the hustings, the culprit exclaimed—

"That's the man, my Lord, who bribed me and three more to press your Lordship, and to carry you on board the Tender; just to treat you, he said, with a trip round to Portsmouth: telling us a long story about how ill you had treated him, and how great an impostor you was, and such like, to make us come into his

plan; and as we were going to Smyrna, why we should never be suspected, he said—and, supposing we were, we should be far enough out of the reach of justice, and he would let us know, before we returned, whether we had any thing to fear from having assisted him in his frolic, as he called the trick he wished to play you—harping, for ever so long, upon his great means to reward us handsomely, let what would be the upshot of the business."

The looks of the elder Milford, and his unfeigned astonishment, fully exonerated him from having been concerned in the abominable transaction; while the Colonel's countenance as plainly declared his guilt. Having found it impossible to awe his accomplice to silence, he found it equally impossible to avert the impending storm; his confidence therefore entirely forsook him, and he never looked up again while he remained upon the hustings. On the other hand, his now

miserable father, after gazing upon him for some seconds, thus gave utterance to the anguish of his mind—

"Sure, in God, my ears deceived me! Can you be the guilty wretch your base accomplice represents you? Am I so unfortunate?"

Every one present, but particularly the gentlemen upon the hustings, pitied the agitated father. Notwithstanding his mistaken pride and known obstinacy, which might both perhaps be attributed more to his uncommon good fortune than to his natural disposition—as there were certainly many good points about him—he was by no means uncharitable, though he had not the most pleasing method of conferring a favour. But this might, in some measure, be owing to his having been born and bred in a counting-house: whereas, there were no such pleas to urge in defence of his son's conduct, for no

money had been spared upon his education. But we are losing sight of our subject.

A sort of pause having succeeded the Merchant's apostrophe to his wretched son, Lord Stanmore desired the sailor to proceed with his story, as it was necessary that he should relate how the Colonel had engaged him to forward his plan.

"Why, about an hour before it had been appointed for us to go on board, my Lord, the Colonel came to our hiding-place, and, calling me on one side, said he supposed I had heard of young Ashby's having returned a great man. I replied, as how I had. So then he told me a long story about his being an impostor, and how impudent he had been to my old master and himself: and, at last, he said he wished to play him a little innocent trick, just to keep him out of the way during the election; because, as he had happened

happened to put out that fire which burnt John Glenton's house down, and had turned actor to please some of the town's-folks, why, he might prevent his being chosen Member, as they were at variance like: so, if I would secretly engage two or three of my friends, to execute a little scheme he had in view, he would give us fifty guineas a-piece now, and as much more when we returned from our voyage. So, believing all he said, and thinking that at all events he meant no harm, as I was to be so well paid for the frolic, why I promised to engage two of my friends to assist me in doing what he had planned: because, if we did not succeed, we were to have twenty pounds a man; and, if we did but follow his directions, he was sure we should never be even suspected. Of course, we were all resolved to earn the fifty, if we could; so he gave me the note which my Lord here has just shewn me, and told us how we were to proceed to bring his plan to bear, promising to be

at

at the slip, where the boat was to come for us, and to make it wait till we had done our job, and also to stand between us and all harm, should our scheme be blown to the Devil. I knew most of the pressgang, and where their boat always laid to carry the pressed men on board. The Colonel told me the Tender was to sail with the next tide; so I knew that a guinea a-piece to them, without telling them who it was I wanted to put under their care, would make them as mute as mice: and as for me, why I should be half-way to Smyrna, I thought, before his Lordship got away from them, if they were obliged to give me up, to save themselves. I need not tell your Honour how well we succeeded; but having sent his Lordship off under a proper guard, before I went on board our own ship, I was again dressed up in one of the Colonel's great coats, to carry a letter to Mr. Wildham's, which would prevent there being any immediate bustle, he told me,

when

when they found the *would-be-great man* did not return so soon as they might expect. So, in the room of being on board at nine o'clock, as I and John Jefferies have sworn—the Lord forgive us! —it was past midnight when we reached the ship; for the Colonel gave us and our boat's crew a treat into the bargain. As for what befel his Lordship, after we gave him into the charge of the press-gang, I cannot take upon me to say; only I know I supposed he had gone to the bottom when the Tender sunk, which rejoiced the Colonel to the very soul. I am sure I thought he would have jumped for joy, when I told him I had seen her go down; because it would prevent the Spanish Don, he said, from giving us any further trouble, as dead men tell no tales! And I am sure I never was more surprised in my born days, than when I found the noble Marquis was come home again, safe and sound; but though he knew me, I do not think I should have known him.

However,

However, this is all I know about the business, as I have a soul to be saved!"

"Have you any reason to believe that Mr. Milford was acquainted with his son's design?" asked Lord Stanmore.

"No, upon my soul, my Lord, I don't think he knew a syllable of the matter. The Colonel assured us he did not: indeed he seemed more fearful of its getting to his ears, than to those of any body else; because he said he should never hear the last of it—his father was such a particular man. But let what would be the consequence, he was determined to send Nandy Ashby to sea, to teach him humility to his betters. Those were his very words: let him contradict me, if he dare."

Our hero, who had greatly pitied Milford from the moment his son's guilt had been thus made public, being now fully convinced of his innocence, approached him, extending his hand, while he said—

"I am

"I am exceedingly sorry, Mr. Milford, that your son should have brought such a disgrace upon himself! Had I sooner known how deeply he was concerned in the plot which I naturally wished to fathom, I give you my word, I would have endeavoured to have spared you your present mortification; and you will not do me justice, if you do not believe me when I declare, that from this moment you may rank me among your friends. Indeed, I can safely swear that I never bore either you or the Colonel the least ill will. I was sorry to find that you entertained a much worse opinion of me, than I trust I should ever have done of any man: but no more of the past, which I am resolved to consign to oblivion.— Colonel Milford, you have nothing to dread, from having succeeded in your malicious frolic, as I consider myself still too much in your father's debt, to seize the opportunity you have afforded me of ruining his son; though I sincerely regret,

regret, upon your father's account, that you should have laid yourself under any obligation to my lenity."

The Merchant was obliged to be supported by two of his friends for some minutes, so great was his agitation; though he continued to hold Ferdinand's hand, which he had more than once carried to his lips during his speech. At last, a violent flood of tears eased his bursting heart; and, when able to speak distinctly, he faintly articulated his thanks to the scarcely less agitated young Duke, and, as his strength returned, he thus continued—

"Why was I doomed to undergo so dreadful a punishment! My Lord Duke, you are much too good to us; but to know that you believe me innocent, is the greatest consolation my misery affords me. My son is a villain—I live to declare it—and very unworthy of the lenity you are

are inclined to shew him, since he rejoiced in your supposed death. Degenerate wretch! But such is the fruit of my mistaken indulgence. For years, I have only seen with his eyes, and heard with his ears—so much was I wrapped up in an only child; and this is the only excuse I have to offer for my past conduct towards your Grace. Yet I never thought he would, in cold blood, have injured any mortal breathing. When he wounded you at the play, I was fearful he did it intentionally; but he persuaded me that he could not help it, and that it was wholly owing to your being off your guard. Again, the method he took to avoid giving your Grace the satisfaction due to a man of honour, made me fear he was a coward; still, however, I found it impossible to tell him I suspected him of want of spirit, though I had much rather he had fallen in the contest, than have seen him disgraced, as he has been, for not giving you the meeting—for he has been expelled

the Guards! Yet, what could a doting father do, your Grace? He was my only child—the sole hope and comfort of my declining age; therefore, had I thrown him off, as he very justly deserved, what would the world have thought of him—or rather, how would they have treated him?—I trust that I have hitherto maintained the character of an honest man in all my dealings, and my efforts have been crowned with the greatest success: indeed, till very lately, I never knew what it was to meet with a loss that gave me a moment's uneasiness! But the day of retribution seems to have arrived; for I have been squandering away very large sums, to gratify the ambition of this basest of all mortals, whom I have the misfortune to call son!—in addition to which, I have lost a very valuable ship, that I may truly deem a judgment upon me and mine; as I vow to God, I shudder even now to think what might have been the consequence of that storm, which I,

poor

poor blind wretch! hardly noticed, while your Grace, thanks to Colonel, or rather Mr. Robert Milford's infernal contrivance, was exposed to all its fury! However, blessed be the Almighty! you escaped unhurt; which has, I hope, convinced the hardened wretch that such crimes as his never go unpunished. My pecuniary losses are, however, of no great consequence, as I have still more than I shall ever spend; and whom have I now to spur me on, to accumulate a still larger fortune? As for thee, villain! who hast brought shame and disgrace upon yourself and family, I disown thee from this moment. No longer will I consider thee—pampered as thou hast hitherto been—as my son! I will allow thee a maintenance, just sufficient to keep thee from starving, in a foreign land; where—thanks to his Grace's clemency—self-exiled, thou must henceforth reside. And if ever I swerve from this, my irrevocable determination, may my life pay the forfeit of my wilful perjury!

jury! I never yet forfeited my word in any matter of moment; and I think I shall be only doing my duty, in making an example of so unprincipled a being—who must, nay shall, leave England before the expiration of another week; or I shall pray that justice may take its course. I have many poor relations, whom I have long since, on your account, ceased to notice: they, however, shall be my heirs, as they will most likely do more good with my money, than ever I have done. To them I will give up my business, which I mean immediately to decline, that I may hide my head in some secluded corner, and there end my miserable life, lamenting that I ever bore the name of father!"

In vain had Ferdinand more than once attempted to interrupt the old man's discourse, wishing to prevent him from making any rash vows. This being, however, impossible, he was obliged to leave the culprit to his fate. The spectators were

were astonished at the Merchant's firmness, which they all secretly applauded; the Colonel, notwithstanding his recent success, being very generally disliked, on account of his overbearing pride towards his inferiors; and one among the crowd, more hardened than the rest, called out—

"Why, Colonel—come, man, face about, and give the word of command for the poll to begin again, or we shan't get you chaired to-night!"

"Ah, my friend," replied the truly humbled father, "I perceive now why he was so anxious to hasten the business of the day; but depend upon no one being again solicited in favour of such a worthless wretch, who certainly can no longer boast of a friend of his own; for what honest man would ever wish to acknowledge he had been in habits of intimacy with Colonel Milford? The poll may close, if there be not forms, which I am unacquainted with, to be first gone through;

through; for I insist upon his name being expunged from among the candidates, as it must be already execrated by every one of those who have given him their vote. I therefore thank God that he was not returned Member; though he would most probably have been kicked out of the House, had he ever attempted to shew his face there."

Lord Stanmore was visibly affected; and, taking the other hand of the wretched parent, he thus endeavoured to console him—

"You must not give way to despair, my good friend! Your son has certainly grossly erred; but I trust he will prove a sincere penitent. The Duke de Medina has assured you he will not act up to the rigour of the law; I therefore trust all may yet be amicably settled, and that you have still many happy days in store."

"No, my Lord Marquis, never again shall I be happy! though your's and the Duke de Medina's kindness quite overpowers me. It was once my greatest boast to rank your Lordship among my friends; but my wilful errors certainly made me forfeit all claims to your future favour: therefore let me request you would suffer me to go and hide my head in some obscure retreat, as even existence is become a burden to me. I know your Lordship wrote to London respecting the late unpleasant business; and I do suppose, had his Grace been sooner forthcoming, the doubts which we have been contriving to keep alive during the election, would long since have been cleared up—in which case, I foresaw we should lose the day. I take shame to myself, however, for having even countenanced (I never approved of them) such base proceedings; but may I enquire what answer your Lordship received? I had

a hint

a hint given me that my son would be obliged to make public excuses."

"He certainly would, my friend, had the Duke been here when I received the Minister's answer, or have exposed himself to the resentment of all those in power; but any excuses he could now make, would only be considered as an additional insult, and I should certainly advise his making a Continental tour; for Ministers may not feel so kindly disposed towards him, as the Duke de Medina has proved himself. No blame can, however, attach to you, my worthy Milford! and, for my own part, I declare I am more your friend than ever."

So said Sir Henry, Mr. Fenwick, and several more gentlemen present; but their kind endeavours to raise his spirits were interrupted by a loud and general hiss. Upon looking around, they perceived the Colonel slinking off through the crowd,

who readily made way for him, contenting themselves with thus politely expressing their detestation of his conduct; though but for his poor father, he was informed, he would not have been let off so easily.

The poor old man turned his back upon the incensed multitude, crying—"Thou art rightly served, miserable wretch! Never, with my consent, shall you again shew your face in a public meeting; but, before I follow you, allow me to give my vote, Gentlemen, for those I should have supported with all my heart and soul, if I had not suffered myself to be deluded by that most specious of all villains, my wretched son. I know you will not require either my vote or my efforts, to secure your election, Sir Henry and Mr. Fenwick; but it will afford me some relief, if you permit me thus publicly to make all the reparation in my power to the worthy Electors of ——, for having

endeavoured

endeavoured to give them a Representative so unworthy of the trust about to be reposed in him."

"As yet, both my friend and myself are a long way behind, Mr. Milford," rejoined Sir Henry; "you will therefore oblige us by giving us your support: though we cannot permit you to leave us merely to give way to gloomy reflections; for I am convinced that you have acquired more sincere friends during the last half hour, than you may probably have done in the whole course of your life."

The poll, therefore, was once more opened, and went on without opposition, or a dissenting voice, as every Burgess, who had not yet voted, was anxious to support the Baronet and Mr. Fenwick. It however soon closed; and the moment the noble Spaniards had seen the returned Members chaired, they hastened to Mr. Wildham's--Mrs. Ashby having been prepared for the happy meeting by Lady

 Ossulston

Ossulston and Miss Deloraine. As for Wildham, the moment he understood that his favourite was returned, and upon the hustings, he hastened thither, to give vent to the overflowings of his excellent heart.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

THE Marquis of Stanmore being very impatient to see his nieces, from whom he expected to obtain a solution of the false alarm which had so immediately preceded our hero's re-appearance, accompanied the uncle and nephew home.

Mrs. Ashby's joy may be better imagined than described, when she once more found herself in the arms of her beloved son, respecting whom she had learned but very little from the ladies who had brought her the pleasing intelligence of his return; as

they merely knew that he had been pressed, and was unable sooner to relieve his friends' anxiety. She had therefore a thousand questions to ask him; but he referred her to his uncle for a particular account of his *perilous adventures* and *hair-breadth 'scapes,* while he went to change his dress.

He had no sooner left the room, than the Marquis of Stanmore, having paid his compliments, and offered his sincere congratulations to Mrs. Ashby, upon her son's almost miraculous preservation and safe return, requested that Lady Ossulston would inform him why Dr. —— had been summoned in such haste, not ten minutes previous to her arrival in ——.

As her Ladyship was not perhaps absolutely sincere in reply, attributing the circumstance wholly to the folly of her servants, though she acknowledged she had been rather alarmed by the appearance of

of the vessel, which had brought our hero over—her fears having magnified a Dutch fishing boat into a French privateer—Lord Stanmore said no more; but as our readers may not be so easily satisfied, we shall be rather more complaisant than her Ladyship, who, as we have already informed them, returned home with Miss Deloraine the preceding evening, not chusing to witness the expected triumph of Colonel Milford. Had the Marquis Almaviva remained at ——, she was convinced that he would not have been so successful; but as the hopes which she had hitherto entertained of his return, were almost annihilated by the unexpected arrival of his uncle—which had made her and all his other friends fear that some dreadful misfortune had befallen him—so well-founded an apprehension had effectually prevented her from sleeping. Listless and uneasy, she therefore rose remarkably early, and the morning being very fine,

though there was a smart breeze, she proposed, after breakfast, their going a fishing, which she thought would enliven he , or at least serve to beguile the time, till they learned who were the successful candidates; they having both resolved not to attend the ball, which was to conclude the evening, if Colonel Milford were returned: and of his being so, they neither of them entertained a doubt.

Her Ladyship's seat was upon the coast, which induced her to keep a little pleasure-boat, that two of her men-servants had been instructed to manage, as she had always been partial to the water, and to the amusement of fishing: therefore, having given her orders for the proposed expedition, she and her cousin, with their respective female attendants, and two footmen, entered the boat; and, having rowed to a sufficient distance to afford them good sport, they began to angle.

Lady Ossulston caught the two first fish, and was in very tolerable spirits—her mind being diverted from more serious reflections—when the fishing smack, in which our hero was passenger, passed near them! and fifty others might have done the same, without her noticing them, if one of her men had not declared it to be a Dutch vessel, which induced her to regard it with more attention than she would otherwise have done; and while she was gazing, the Marquis, having borrowed the Master's glass, was also reconnoitring them, and caught a glimpse of those features which had, unknown to himself, made an indelible impression upon his heart. Lady Ossulston, resuming her occupation, wondered where the Mynheers were bound, and was soon informed that they had cast anchor, and were hoisting out their boat.

"Why, surely they are not coming to visit me!" she cried; "I have no ac-

quaintance among the *burgomasters* and their *frows*."

The men presumed that they could not get any nearer to ——, as the wind stood, which had induced them to anchor where they were. But when she saw several men in the boat, which was evidently rowing towards them, she was rather surprised, declaring "that, had Great Britain been at that time at war with Holland, she should have suspected they had some sinister designs."

The *Abigails* were infinitely more terrified than their mistresses, observing, that though England was not at war with the Dutch, these might be smugglers or pirates, and God only knew what might be their intention!—they therefore wished the men to make the best of their way home.

The men laughed at their silly fears, and the ladies affected to be equally

courageous,

courageous, though they did not above half like the appearance of the strangers; but as it would have been useless to attempt rowing away from four active Dutchmen, they agreed, with affected unconcern, to wait the issue where they were: when, to their infinite astonishment, the moment that the boats were near enough, the ladies heard themselves addressed by their names! and, having thrown off a seaman's wrapping grego, our hero, forgetting his disordered, dirty appearance, so soon as the boats were alongside, stepped into her Ladyship's.

To say that she was glad to see him, would very poorly express her sensations! —indeed, her agitation was so great, that it was some seconds before she could bid him welcome, while her companions, no longer dreading the supposed pirates, began to rejoice at his return; Miss Deloraine exclaiming—"In the name of Heaven,

Heaven, Marquis, where have you been? and how came you here? Have you been in Holland, at last?"

"I certainly have, my dear Ma'am! though not absolutely by choice."

He was holding Lady Ossulston's hand while answering her cousin, and was not a little vexed when he perceived how much his abrupt introduction of himself had alarmed the whole party, particularly the fair widow; who, having faintly articulated that she was happy to see him, made the men a sign to row for home, and by a similar gesture induced Ferdinand to seat himself between her and her cousin, though he wished, being now perfectly sensible of his dirty appearance, to have placed himself on the opposite side. They, however, insisted upon his doing as they desired, enquiring "why he had, contrary to his inclination, taken so long a voyage?"

He

He entered into a few cursory details; but the men had scarcely put the boat in motion, ere Lady Ossulston, overcome by various contending emotions, fainted—and would most probably, but for our hero's encircling arms, who caught her as she was falling back, have gone overboard.

The two maids, particularly her Ladyship's, rent the air with their screams! The latter was sure her poor, dear Lady was dead, and wondered how his Lordship could think of frightening them all out of their wits, as he had done. The boat belonging to the Dutch vessel, being very near, she entreated and begged, for God's sake, that the sailors would make all possible haste towards the shore! pointing out Ossulston House, whence she requested that they would immediately dispatch a messenger for Dr. ——."

The men instantly obeyed the terrified, shrieking Abigail; and as they reached the

the shore nearly ten minutes before the other boat, they had sent off a groom before the party landed, though by that time her Ladyship was very much recovered: she was therefore astonished to see all her household running towards the landing place, each countenance bespeaking terror and dismay.

Miss Deloraine told her how she supposed they had been alarmed, mentioning the orders which the maid had given.

"Silly creature!" cried her Ladyship, "and is any one actually gone for Dr. ——?"

She was assured that William had been gone some minutes.

"Then let the postchaise be got ready as soon as possible, that I may follow; for I dare say William will kill me outright, in his zeal to save my life, and thus

thus terrify my uncle and friends out of their wits."

Our hero was by no means sorry that she was thus anxious to reach ——, particularly when he learned that the poll was expected to close that morning, and in favour of Colonel Milford; as he hoped that his unexpected return would prove a check to the fop's triumph.

This he told the ladies; who, having forced him to drink a few glasses of wine, and eat a sandwich, while the carriage was getting ready, obliged him, very much against his will (as he wished to have been accommodated with a saddle-horse), to take his seat between them; and, during their very short drive, he informed them, that he strongly suspected Colonel Milford had employed the fellows who had forced him on board the Tender. They were therefore repeatedly hurrying the postillions, who galloped their horses

the

the whole way; and, to their infinite joy, Dr. ——, whom they met as they entered the town, assured them that they were in very good time.

Having set our hero down, and remarked the astonishment, not unmixed with terror, which Colonel Milford's countenance exhibited, they, in compliance with Ferdinand's earnest request, hastened to Mr. Wildham's. Their countenances proclaimed them the heralds of joyful tidings, and Mrs. Ashby was rendered completely happy by the certainty of soon seeing and embracing her darling son; while the delighted Wildham, having danced a jig to his own music, snapping time with his fingers, flew to the hustings, to welcome the young Duke, "who he was sure would impede Bob Milford's triumph."

He had promised to return to the ladies as soon as he had shaken hands with his Grace;

Grace; but he found it impossible to quit the hustings before the Colonel had been hissed off, when he hurried home, and was in the middle of his tale, when the uncle, nephew, and Lord Stanmore arrived; and the latter, having heard the short account which Lady Ossulston chose to give of her very unexpected meeting with our hero, in return, told her and Mrs. Ashby every thing that had passed upon the hustings, from the moment of the young Duke's return; who soon joined them again, dressed with his accustomed elegance, and while they were expressing their regret for the elder Milford, whom they thought greatly to be pitied.

Having once more welcomed him home, and made him repeat great part of his adventures, to which they listened—particularly to his account of the storm—with sensations bordering on horror, they were at a loss to express their gratitude towards

towards that all-powerful Being, who alone can silence the roaring ocean, "and bid the winds forget to blow," for his miraculous preservation! every one of the gentlemen avowing his determination to reward the two old sailors, whom necessity, not choice, had led on board the Tender—as they were supposed to be past their work. They had already interested our hero in their fate, who had, before he landed, resolved to settle a small annuity on each, and they had, by his desire, followed him on foot to ——, and were now being hospitably regaled in Wildham's kitchen.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

BUT to return to the disgraced Colonel. Having heard his father publicly renounce him, and knowing how much he was the slave of his word, he had no hope of inducing him to alter his intentions; and having just shame enough left, to make him wish to quit England, where he was certain he should no longer be able to figure in the style he had hitherto done, he resolved to prove himself a complete villain, by way of revenging himself upon his miserable father, for having dared to set him at defiance. The moment, therefore,

fore, he got out of the crowd, he hastened home.

It was too much of a holiday for any business to be going forward, except at his father's bank, which could not be shut till a certain hour, and there it was not supposed that much would be done; only one old clerk, therefore, was left in charge, and he had not, as it may be supposed, heard of the Colonel's disgrace—who, putting a good face upon the matter, ran into the office, apparently in a great bustle, exclaiming—

"Ryland! how much money is there in the house?"

"I have got about eight thousand pounds, Sir; but your father is amply provided, I know, in case any more should be wanted. He received twenty thousand yesterday, which he called in, for fear there should be another run upon the house, though we have no sums of any consequence

consequence out; but our late momentary stop has rendered him over cautious in my opinion."

"Yes, yes, it certainly has," rejoined the Colonel; "but you must give me every farthing you can spare, this very moment, and send to my father for more, if you should have any demands you are not aware of."

"I hope, Sir, you are not hard pushed," cried the unsuspicious clerk.

"I positively am; so be quick."

The treasures being displayed, he did not chuse to suffer the man to count over what he took; but, seizing the greater part, he flew into the house, and into his father's closet, where he procured the key of the iron chest by merely forcing a lock, and whence he took every shilling that he could find, and every other valuable upon which he could immediately lay his hands, either of his own or belonging to his parents. He then slipped

out

out by a back way, and took the nearest cut to where he understood the Dutch fishing boat lay at anchor, waiting the turn of the tide. Having made them a signal, he was immediately taken on board; when, offering them a large bribe to set sail immediately, the Dutchman found it impossible to withstand the temptation, as he was perfectly indifferent where he was landed, so long as he did but lose sight of the English coast—thinking it very possible that his father might feel inclined to pursue him.

Every thing, however, combined to facilitate his escape. The Merchant, that he might not give way to gloomy reflections, was detained, against his will, till the poll closed, and the Members were chaired; nor was he then suffered to depart till he had promised to dine with them. No one had taken upon himself to break the very unpleasant news to Mrs. Milford, whom no one pitied more than

than Mrs. Ashby, as she could not help contrasting their situations; but to the unhappy father's lot did it fall, to acquaint his wife with the public everlasting stigma which was now attached to their son's character.

Fortunately, Mrs. Milford's feelings were not so acute as those of her husband: she wept very bitterly for a short time, but was by no means so sensibly affected by the disgrace which their son had brought upon them, as Milford was; and having rather recovered from her first paroxysm of grief, she wondered "she had not seen Robert! for, as he had left the hustings so long since, he must have come home;" but presumed that he had retired to his own room, agreeing with Milford, that solitude might bring him to repentance. They therefore resolved that he should not be disturbed till his father had come to some determination respecting his future destiny, as he was

at present wholly at a loss how to dispose of him; but the weak mother became half frantic, when he represented to her the necessity of his immediately going abroad, probably never to return. Repeatedly did she wish that Ferdinand had never returned to ——, till the provoked Milford sternly asked her—"whether the certainty of his death, hastened by her son's iniquities, would have rendered her more happy than she was at present." She then explained, declaring that she merely meant she wished he had remained in Spain!

They were debating this point—our hero having made himself a great interest in the Merchant's heart, from having displayed so much lenity towards his son, when Ryland, the old clerk, having a call for more money than his young master had left him, came (understanding that the Merchant was returned) to demand some of him. Startled at the unexpected

expected request, and at what he said, Milford desired him to explain, enquiring when he had seen his son, and what he meant by his not having left him enough money.

The man instantly repeated every word which had passed between them, dwelling very forcibly upon the Colonel's haste, agitation, &c. &c. The more than ever provoked father agreed that he was not to blame, as all his banking clerks had, years before, received orders to let the Colonel have what money he required, and retired to fetch a supply.

During his absence, the now curious Ryland ventured to ask his mistress, whether any-thing disagreeable had happened, as they both appeared so cast down: surely, the Colonel had not lost his election, after all their trouble and expence!

Mrs. Milford could only answer by her tears; when her husband returned, stamping and raving like a madman, and declaring that he was robbed of every shilling he had in the house by that serpent, whom he had nourished in his bosom, and till now called his son. "Cease to weep for so base a wretch!" he sternly said to his wife. Then turning to the petrified clerk—"How much do you want?"

Ryland was so confused by what he saw and heard, that he obliged his master to repeat his question, and at last stammered out—"About fifty pounds, Sir."

"Then I have more than enough about me to answer that demand," giving him notes to the value of several hundreds. "I value not the money," he continued, "as I have still much more than enough to answer every demand upon me; but don't keep people waiting, Ryland! nor need

need you repeat what escaped me during an unguarded moment."

The man bowed, and retired; when Milford told his wife, that his son had robbed him of upwards of thirty thousand pounds, with which he supposed he had made his escape.—"Well, let him go!" he continued; "I shall not pursue him: but I will take care it shall be the last money he shall ever handle of mine. Still, my character must not suffer more than it has done already; I must therefore endeavour to raise some money, to answer the immediate demands which will doubtless be made upon me. Robert certainly never means to shew his face in England again; nay, by Heavens, he dares not! therefore, we have no longer a son: indeed, his last base action has rendered him quite an alien to our blood, in my opinion."

"I wish I could as easily forget him, Mr. Milford!" rejoined the weeping

 mother;

mother; "but I shall always remember how dear he once was to us both!"

"I can only blush for my past folly," replied the husband, "which, for such a length of time, has rendered me blind to his failings. Has not he forfeited every claim to our regard? Did he even take a farewell look of either? Ought we therefore to regret such an unprincipled being, whose conduct towards either the Duke de Medina or us, admits of no excuse? Of what use is education, if it only serve to bring a man to the gallows? Far better he had been brought up in the counting-house, as I was before him, than to have had thousands thrown away in masters, to render him the fine gentleman, which is but too frequently a synonymous term for rascal! I am half inclined to rejoice at his last base action, since it has completely opened my eyes, and cured me of all my mistaken pride: therefore, if I do continue in business, I will not

suffer

suffer my money to accumulate, as heretofore; though I am resolved to be more frugal in my expences, that I may have it in my power to do a little good during my lifetime."

Thus did the Merchant run on to his weeping wife, till she asked him to accompany her into their son's apartment, to see if he had left any letter or memorandum behind him, which might enable them to guess whither he was gone. They found every thing in confusion; his drawers had all been torn open, and were so left, in his haste to select his valuables and to make his escape; as his servants had not thought proper to follow him home, guessing that they should not be immediately, if ever wanted again. Besides, he had lost all his consequence in their eyes; they therefore chose to accompany the Members round the town, before they sought the degraded Colonel, whose disgrace and abrupt departure were

soon made known among his father's clerks and household—some of them having seen him make his shabby exit from the crowd; but as to where he was gone, or by what conveyance, it was not so speedily made public.

We will therefore return to the happy party we left at Wildham's, rejoicing over our hero's escape from the accumulated evils which had befallen him during his absence. They had so many things to talk over, that they had not thought of separating, till the Members, having had their ride, came to inform the gentlemen that dinner was almost ready, which they hoped the two Dukes would honour with their presence.

The Marquis of Stanmore had previously made the same request, knowing how much such an addition to the company would gratify the other guests: therefore, though the uncle and nephew

had

had many things to say to Mrs. Ashby, who, on her side, wished that she could uninterruptedly have enjoyed a few hours of their society, they found it impossible to withstand the joint entreaties of their kind friends But as the Ambassador's presence was required in London, to bring the business he had come over upon to a final conclusion, and his apparent neglect towards the resident Ambassador remained unaccounted for, he thought proper to dispatch an immediate express to that Nobleman, to inform him what had prevented him from answering his last letters, and to let him know when he might expect to see him, as he proposed setting off for London the following morning.

Lady Ossulston, it has already been said, had decided not to have graced the ball with her presence, and Miss Deloraine would of course have followed her example; but so many strange events had

occurred since she had formed this determination, that no one could accuse her of caprice, when she altered her mind. In the first place, the two gentlemen, whose cause she espoused, were returned Members; and, what was in her opinion far more satisfactory, our hero was restored to his lamenting friends, and would, no doubt, be at this said ball—indeed, he had said so, when he pleaded a wish to be excused from joining the convivial party at dinner; she therefore proposed setting off home, where she and her cousin could dine and dress, and returning in the evening. But Mrs. Ashby had thought of a much less fatiguing plan: she therefore requested the ladies would do her the favour to dine with her, and dispatch one of their servants for their maids, and what clothes they chose to order.

So considerate a proposal met the approbation of every one present, and was readily acceded to by the ladies. Before the

the Members took their leave, however, they debated how they ought to act with respect to the unfortunate Merchant; when it was finally agreed that the Marquis of Stanmore, our hero, and his uncle should take his house in their way to dinner, and there they should be better able to decide, whether or not he ought to be left to his private reflections: at all events, it was thought that the visit must be flattering at such a moment.

Ferdinand having written his letter, which Wildham undertook to dispatch, they set out upon their charitable errand, and were very politely received by the truly humbled Milford, who frankly told them, in confidence well understood, how largely his son had robbed him; but begged to be excused joining the dinner party, or appearing at the ball in the evening. His visitors were shocked at this fresh proof of the Colonel's villany; the circumstances attending which, the

no longer blind father accurately detailed, acknowledging "that so large and unexpected a loss, in addition to the sums which he had been squandering away during the last month, would for the moment rather inconvenience him; though, had it been three times as much, it would not have materially affected his fortune, greatly as he might be embarrassed for the moment."

Our hero instantly offered him his credit to the amount of twenty thousand pounds. The Merchant accepted of half the sum, which would more than enable him to answer all his immediate demands, and because it would afford him infinite satisfaction to be still further obliged to a Nobleman, who had so kindly forgiven his late unpardonable conduct, and who had displayed such lenity towards his miserable son, that he might not be exposed to any further shame upon his account. In ten days, or a fortnight

at latest, he should be able to replace the money, though he should ever consider himself as greatly the Duke's debtor.

The gentlemen therefore took their leave of him for the present, leaving him comparatively happy, since his character as a merchant would not suffer. When out of hearing, Lord Stanmore declared that young Milford had proved himself a consummate rascal! adding, "The old man gains ground in my esteem every succeeding interview; though, with the best intentions in the world, I could not just now have offered him the loan of even five thousand pounds, for, like him, the election has rather drained my purse."

He was still speaking, when they were accosted by Mrs. Hesham, who had been invited to dine with Mrs. Milford and a few select friends, whom she was to accompany to the ball, which it had been expected would display the triumph of

Colonel

Colonel Milford. Having curtsied, with a degree of profundity to which she had long been unaccustomed, to the three Nobles, she ventured to congratulate our hero upon his safe return, and was proceeding to expatiate upon the Colonel's wickedness; but the gentlemen cut her short, by observing "they should keep dinner waiting." She therefore pursued her way to the Merchant's, though she hardly supposed that she should be received—not that she had yet learned the Colonel's elopement, but she presumed his recent disgrace would have unfitted his parents for society; still, not to go according to her appointment, might (particularly circumstanced as they were) be deemed an unpardonable affront; and, as old Milford's character had not suffered, and as he must still be a very rich man, she would not run the risk of offending them, even admitting that her punctuality should deprive her of a good dinner, as she supposed Mrs. Milford would

be

be denied, and it would be too late to go to the Mayor's; still she was conscious that condoling was not her forte: therefore, but for the hopes she entertained of getting something better to eat than her own larder ever afforded, she would much rather have staid away.

Mrs. Milford had been in too much affliction to think of sending round, to request that her friends would suffer her to indulge her grief in solitude; Mrs. Hesham was therefore of course admitted: though all those she had expected to meet, had been discreet enough to send their excuses to the disconsolate mistress of the mansion. The old gossip had hardly decided, when she left home, whether or not it would be best to acknowledge that she had heard of their son's glorious retreat from the hustings; but, upon being received with streaming eyes by Mrs. Milford, she found that she must exert herself to console the distressed mother, vowing that

that she should not have intruded upon her at such a time, if she had not feared that she might have fancied she neglected her in the season of her affliction: indeed, it was not proper that she should be left alone, to magnify small evils into very great ones; as, for her own part, she only considered the trick which the Colonel had played the young Spaniard, as a youthful frolic! though she acknowledged—the Duke's rank and power considered—that the joke had been carried rather too far.

Now the fact was, that no one gloried in the proud fop's downfall so much as Mrs. Hesham did; nor was she sorry that *Nandy Ashby* had come in for his share of punishment, if it were only for having shewn her so many of his quality airs. But the imperious, sarcastic Colonel had long been her aversion; and she had often, after having suffered him to make her his butt, prognosticated to her dear

Mrs.

Mrs. Burton, "that upstart pride was sure, sooner or later, to have a fall;" observing, at the same time, that the Milfords had carried the sway at —— long enough.

Both the Merchant and his wife were, however, once more her dupes; for, though the former was by no means inclined to extenuate his son's actions, still he could not be displeased with any of his friends for so doing. But when she understood, from some words which dropped between him and his wife, that the culprit had left ——, she was upon tenter-hooks for a further explanation, when, being fortunately, as she conceived, left alone for a few minutes with Mrs. Milford, she even made shift to squeeze out a few tears—so much did she participate in her dear friend's sorrows; adroitly expressing a wish to know where the Colonel was gone, and offering to perform impossibilities to bring

bring about a reconciliation between him and her beloved friends.

Mrs. Milford, more and more her dupe, (though this was at least the hundred and ninety-ninth time that she had suffered the old woman to pick her brains, for the gratification of Mrs. Burton and her society,) told her as usual, under the seal of secrecy, what a capital stroke the Colonel had made previous to his departure. Mrs. Hesham was no sooner in possession of this intelligence, than, hastily feeling in her pocket, she declared, "the circumstance had reminded her that she had left the key in her bureau, which contained all her valuables: she must therefore just step home, to secure her treasures, as there was no knowing what might happen at such riotous times!"

Now her's was the very last house that any one would have thought of entering

—except

—except indeed out of pure spite against the old woman—as her scanty quarterly allowance was always devoured long before it became due: therefore, she never had a guinea that she could properly call her own. But in the present instance, she was merely anxious to ease her mind before dinner, fearful lest any one should get the start of her at the Mayor's. Away, in consequence, she strode to Mrs. Burton's; where several ladies were also assembled, and were warmly debating upon the occurrences of the morning, when Mrs. Hesham sent in her compliments, requesting to speak three words to Mrs. Burton; who, readily obeying her summons, soon learned the *grand secret*, which having imparted, with the same injunctions she had received from Mrs. Milford, away went the spinster, and rejoined that lady in too short a time to lead her to suspect she had been any where but home.

Mrs.

Mrs. Burton's guests were soon rendered as wise as herself; and, in a very short time, the robbery which the Colonel had committed, was magnified to three times the sum that he had made free with! But the indefatigable gossip was not yet satisfied; for even the Milfords could not guess whither he was gone, and that was a matter which she resolved to ascertain. Immediately after dinner, therefore, she hinted having promised to call upon a poor woman, who had received a hurt during the bustle, requesting leave of absence for a short time, to fulfil her benevolent purpose.

Milford gave her a guinea for the invalid, which obliged her, contrary to her first intention—not daring to appropriate it to her own use—to astonish Goody Dawkins, by stalking into her house, to enquire after her health, and to deliver Mr. Milford's present. Having accepted a seat, as the hut was near one of the

entrances

entrances into ———, she asked the woman "if she had seen Colonel Milford pass her door about one o'clock?" She could not say she had. Away, therefore, stormed the restless spinster, hastening to every other outlet for either horse or foot passengers, and making a similar enquiry wherever she hoped to have her curiosity gratified. But all in vain; till she reached some fishermen's huts at the back of the town, leading to the sands, where she had once before made enquiries respecting our hero, on the day he took his cold bath. There, upon putting the question, she was told by some children who knew him, that they had seen him go by, much about the time she mentioned, upon the full run, and they believed he crossed the water; and, upon further enquiry, she learned that a fisherman, by the aid of his glass, had seen the Dutchman's boat come on shore, and return again to the skiff, which had immediately raised her anchor, and

and set sail, though the wind was very unfavourable.

This was enough for Mrs. Hesham, who, without caring whether the intelligence was true or false, was resolved to propagate, as a fact, his being gone off to Holland. With this intention, she returned to the afflicted mother, who was very thankful for the trouble she had taken—purely, as she assured that lady, to relieve her mind; not that much could be apprehended from his despair, as it had prompted him to take such effectual means to provide for the future.

From the Merchant's, she, as usual, hastened to the Mayor's, where she did not scruple to affirm, that "Bob Milford was a vile rogue, and that she had long since entertained but a very so-so opinion of his principles; though she had never spoken her mind so freely to his parents, who

who were to the full as much to blame as the impudent boy, whom they had spoiled, and brought up to pick their own eyes out, and to make game of his betters. But the pitcher had gone to the well once too often!—he had met with his overmatch in the young Don, who had suffered him to escape much too easily; as such low fellows ought to be made examples of, for the benefit of society in general."

Having thus delivered her sentiments, she hastened home to dress for the ball, where she resolved to publish all she knew, *pro bono publico.*

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

LADY Ossulston was just going to open the ball with our hero, when the Colonel having sailed in the vessel which had brought his Grace over, was whispered in her ear by a person who had learned the intelligence from Mrs. Hesham, with every *et cætera*. Her Ladyship wished him a pleasant voyage, and hoped that his ill-gotten riches would not be the means of his going to the bottom.

Ferdinand thought that he deserved some punishment; but hoped he would be allowed time for repentance!

Never

Never, perhaps, had any two people looked to greater advantage in the eyes of each other, than this said couple; having neither of them—from what motive we leave to the penetration of our readers—spared any pains to decorate their handsome persons: the Duke having dressed again for the ball, which was kept up with infinite spirit till broad daylight, when Ferdinand said, that "instead of going to bed, he believed he should set out for London."

His gay partner was already apprized of his intended journey; yet she with difficulty smothered a sigh, while "she hoped he meant to return to ——?"

"Undoubtedly!" he replied; "as my uncle will remain here, for whom I shall return as speedily as possible; indeed business, not inclination, now takes me to London."

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI ... TANJORE

She felt rather more reconciled to his approaching departure, though she hardly knew whether she ought to wish to see him again; because — notwithstanding she had now and then been tempted to believe that she was not absolutely indifferent to him—she began to suspect that he possessed too much national pride to make her an offer of his hand. He was now become one of the first men in Spain, and nominated Viceroy of Mexico, therefore might think no woman, beneath the rank of a Princess, worthy his serious notice—more especially, as his first wife was a descendant from the once-celebrated Peruvian Incas: besides, the Duke de L'Infantado would encourage him to look very high, when he did deign to make a second choice. And, after all, ought she to wish to put her happiness into the keeping of a foreigner of any rank, since it would oblige her to reside abroad—probably in South America—thus placing the Atlantic between her and all her

relations?

relations? No! she would never consent to such a proposal—she would reject his proffered hand. But there was no chance, she conceived, of her being put to such a trial; all she had to guard against, was her own weakness.

The Duke accompanied her home to Mr. Fenwick's, where he took a very polite leave of her, hoping that she would allow him to pay his respects to her, when he returned, either at her own house, Lord Stanmore's, or at ——.

She was at a loss what to say, being afraid that her faltering accents would betray her secret; but endeavoured to rally him in her usual strain, though she fancied his countenance told her a very flattering tale. However, she hastened to her own apartment the moment he drove from the door, in hopes of sleeping off her late fatigue; but her slumbers were short and disturbed. Again she

 debated

debated—should she, or should she not, accept of his hand, admitting that he put her to the test? Love whispered that she must accompany the all-accomplished Spaniard even across the Atlantic! and had he put the question to her then, he most certainly would have borne off the prize. But she was left full leisure for reflection, as the Duke set off for London, after changing his dress, and taking an early breakfast with his mother and uncle; leaving the Electors of —— to recover from the fatigues and excesses of the last fortnight: and, unpleasantly as he had spent the greatest part of that time, he could not help thinking that

"Whatever is—is right!"

For, had he participated in the riotous doings, he might have felt the effects of his complaisance much longer than he should, having been confined on board the Tender. Besides, his late hard fare—

not

not to say fasting—gave him an additional relish for luxuries.

Having started soon after sunrise, owing to his paying as every rich man ought to do—but more particularly those who represent the higher powers—notwithstanding the fatigue which post-horses are sure to undergo during a general election, he reached London before sunset, and drove immediately to the Spanish Ambassador's, who did not expect to have seen him before the next day; but having resolved to set out, instead of going to bed, he did not chuse to stop upon the road, except to take some refreshment, that he might be the better able to indulge the next morning.

To the Ambassador he was under a sort of necessity of relating more in detail, what he had already written him, to account for his having delayed coming to town, to finish his official business. But,

notwithstanding the slight manner in which he had mentioned, in his recent dispatches, what had prevented him from receiving and answering his Excellency's letters, that gentleman, anxious to display his zeal to the Spanish Prime Minister (who was sufficiently near him to be fully able to appreciate his good intentions), had mentioned the circumstance to those in power, when he waited upon them to let them know at what time they might expect the Duke de Medina Sidonia; and as he entered into every detail, which he could gather or surmise from Ferdinand's very short letter, namely, that Colonel Milford had contrived to have his Grace conveyed on board the Tender, which had gone to the bottom during the late dreadful storm, with various *et cætera,* that the readers are already acquainted with, the gentlemen whom he addressed, declared that they hardly knew which was most surprising, Colonel Milford's innate villany, or his total disregard of its probable consequences

sequences with respect to himself. Indeed, they should be tempted to believe that he had foreseen the late storm, which had so nearly proved fatal to his Grace; or possibly he might have bribed the rascals, who had seconded him so ably, to fling him overboard: however, his Excellency might depend upon his meeting with his deserts.

It had therefore been resolved to have recourse to the most rigorous measures respecting the culprit, some hours before his late victim arrived in London, who was first to be consulted; and the Ministerial vengeance was to pursue the wretched Colonel, even to the taking of his life, which it was conceived he had forfeited by his late illegal and atrocious procedure. This the Ambassador repeated to our hero, who only smiled at the warmth and anxiety which he displayed to bring the villain to justice, telling him, "that he was already amply revenged;" relating

the conclusion of the election, and how the Colonel had made his escape.

That was very unfortunate, the Ambassador thought, as a messenger was in readiness to be dispatched, to secure his person ; and he knew it was also in contemplation, to have the father taken into custody, as being concerned in the plan.

Our hero hastened, therefore, to the Premier's, to exculpate the Merchant, and to inform him that the Colonel was self-exiled from his native land. But the messenger, who was to take charge of the runaway, had already left London—Ministers having thought that they might appear deficient in point of zeal and politeness, had they longer delayed taking measures to have this audacious plotter secured. His Grace was, however, in time to prevent the father from undergoing the mortification of being arrested, and examined before the Privy Council ; and, at his

his request, all further proceedings against the exile were laid aside, and the father's honour and character were declared unimpeached, after Ferdinand had stated the heads of what had passed, and how sincerely Milford condemned his son.

During his absence, his uncle, not chusing to keep possession of what was considered as his apartment at Wildham's, took up his abode, in compliance with that gentleman's particular request, at Mr. Fenwick's, who had taken nearly as great a liking to the uncle as he had before done to the nephew. Mrs. Ashby had, likewise, greatly extolled the new Member to her brother; and, at the expiration of a couple of days, both brother and sister accompanied him to his villa, after promising the Marquis of Stanmore to spend a week at the Priory, when Ferdinand returned. His Lordship was therefore obliged to content himself with frequently becoming his neighbour

Fenwick's guest, during their stay, as the Member was resolved not to part with them till he had also enjoyed a little of our hero's company, declaring that he stood engaged to spend a few nights with him before he left England; and this good man soon made himself such an interest in the hearts of both his guests, that they looked forward with regret to their approaching separation. Indeed, the Duke was not only pleased with his host, but he was delighted with the country, and particularly with the elegant villa which he inhabited. Talking upon the subject one day, while strolling round the pleasure grounds with Mr. Fenwick and his sister, he said—"I could easily reconcile myself to spend the remainder of my life in this charming situation, provided I always enjoyed the same society I do at present."

"And I need not say how happy your fixing your residence in England would make me, my dear Philip!" rejoined Mrs. Ashby;

Ashby; "but you will never, like me, become an exile from your native country, where I should feel myself more a stranger than you do in Great Britain."

"Then at all events," said Mr. Fenwick, "I live in hopes of prevailing upon one of you to remain with me for life. You, my dear Madam, have declared your preference for Old England, and you have also appeared to approve of my cottage: we have long known each other by reputation, and I never heard Mrs. Ashby's name mentioned by the few people who had the gratification of being classed among her acquaintance, but with the respect so much her due. I am suddenly —certainly very unexpectedly, and rather in opposition to my wishes, become a public character; but it is truly said, '*Vox Populi, Vox Dei!*' That I have obeyed, and if I am but able to render my country any service, I shall not repine; though, very contrary to my inclination, I must, while I am in Parliament, spend

some part of the year in London: and there I shall, more than ever, stand in need of an agreeable domestic circle; for I have an aversion to taverns and coffee-houses, notwithstanding the great Dr. Johnson preferred them to the houses of his best friends: in short, I feel I shall more than ever want an amiable wife. Have I made myself understood, Mrs. Ashby? I do not profess to be a violent lover; but I am a very sincere admirer of your numerous good qualities; and if you will do me the honour to accept of my hand, why I shall have the additional one of styling the Duke de L'Infantado my brother, and the amiable Duke de Medina my son; which will afford me no small gratification, I can assure you.—I may appear too presuming: in that case, tell me so at once; but keep my folly a secret, that I may not be laughed at a second time. My fortune is more than adequate to all our wants; and, as it is entirely at my own disposal, I trust you

will

will not find me ungenerous in my second proposal, should my first meet your approbation. I am well aware that my gain will prove my friend Wildham's loss; and, as I have the highest esteem for him, rather than run the risk of his calling me out—which, in his place, I should be very much tempted to do—I will invite him to make one of my family! Catherine shall also be properly provided for: in short, I will do my utmost endeavours to render every thing agreeable to all parties. Thus I conclude what I have to say at present upon the subject; and if I can but make as great a display of my oratory in Parliament, I trust I shall very soon be offered a pension to hold my tongue, and thus, like many more, make a sinecure of my seat in St. Stephen's Chapel."

Mrs. Ashby listened to this unexpected proposal with unfeigned surprise, but not unmixed with satisfaction, as she plainly perceived that he was very much in earnest.

The

The Duke scarcely suffered him to bring his harangue to a conclusion, before he caught his hand.— "My dear friend, whether or not my sister accept your offer, I consider it as a very flattering proof of your regard for her, myself, and my absent nephew. She is perfectly her own mistress; and, though you may not have heard of the circumstance, her son has settled a very handsome fortune upon her, which, like your own, is wholly at her own disposal: and I am convinced that he will double it, should his mother consent to bear so respectable a name. I am also greatly in her debt; but we must, in the first place, as you very justly observe, allow her time to deliberate upon your kind offers, before we begin to talk of settlements: I can only say, that I should return home much better satisfied, were I to leave her so eligibly settled. She now knows my sentiments, and I think my nephew's will exactly coincide with mine; but she is old enough to decide

decide for herself, and I do not mean to make use of the influence which my relationship might be supposed to give me over her. And you, my dear Fenwick," he gaily continued, "are, I presume, willing to allow her a few hours for reflection, before you require her final answer."

Mrs. Ashby was literally so much taken by surprise, that she was not sorry her brother had afforded her an opportunity of remaining so long silent; though what he had said, had made her come to almost an immediate decision. Possibly, if her son had not rendered her absolutely independent, and left her at full liberty to dispose of the thirty thousand pounds which he had settled upon her, she would not have so speedily determined to accept of her admirer's liberal offers; but knowing that she should most likely present him with a fortune fully adequate to his own — as she made no doubt of her brother's

brother's and son's generosity upon the occasion—she therefore did not scruple to express the pleasure she felt at standing so high in Mr. Fenwick's opinion; nor to assure him, "that, with respect to his flattering proposals, she should be wholly guided by her brother and son, whose joint kindness towards her deserved every return she could make."

Mr. Fenwick politely thanked his fair intended for having put him out of suspense; as he considered her reference to her brother and son, as a tacit consent to his proposals: which the Duke confirmed by hailing him by the familiar appellation peculiar to their intended relationship.

CHAP. VI.

LADY Ossulston was by no means so happy. She had dined twice at Mr. Fenwick's, since his return to his villa, but had refused to become his guest: indeed, she was grown fonder than ever of solitude; preferring the company of her cousin, who was now in all her secrets, to that of any of her other friends.

She had heard when the Duke de Medina was expected; and as the time drew near, she grew more unsettled, and more fearful of betraying her regard for him,

him, which she flattered herself had hitherto escaped the notice of every one. In this, however, she was mistaken; as the Marquis of Stanmore had suspected the state of her heart, from the time when our hero was so strangely missing. Nor was the Duke de L'Infantado without similar suspicions; having narrowly scrutinized her Ladyship's countenance, whenever his nephew's name was mentioned. He also, like her, reflected that the Duke was become one of the first men in Spain; and that, having been formerly allied to Peruvian Royalty, his alliance would now be courted by some of the first families even of Old Castile: and he knew several that had marriageable daughters. He was, in consequence, some time before he could bring himself to think, even with common patience, of his marrying an English woman—which was a convincing proof that he had not absolutely got rid of his national prejudices; as he foresaw so many advantages likely to accrue to his

nephew

nephew from various matches which he had in view, that he fancied it would be impeaching his judgment, were he to think of a foreigner, who would of course be looked upon as nobody in Spain: but the more he saw of Lady Ossulston, the more he became attached to her, and the more reasons he found to lead him to think that she was an exception, and ought not to be indiscriminately included in his class of foreigners. Besides, the Duke was born in England, and had been brought up in part there, which must have rendered him partial to English men and women, and to their national customs. He certainly professed the Catholic religion; but he was no bigot to his faith; therefore, his marrying a Protestant would not astonish his friends: nay, even the Duke himself now entertained a very different idea of those he had heretofore deemed heretics. Possibly, could his Grace have dictated to his nephew, as he was wont to do when he first acknow-

ledged

ledged him, he might not have been so indulgent; but he no rather looked up to him, as Mr. Milford had long done to his hopeful heir: he was, therefore, well aware that he must go very gently to work, if he hoped to succeed in detaching him from Lady Ossulston, allowing her to have made a deep impression upon his heart. Besides, he considered that it was the man who raised the woman of his choice to his own rank; and Ferdinand was upon the eve of returning to Mexico, where he had very large possessions, and was so much beloved, that he might perhaps never wish to return again to Spain, even after his death. In short, his Grace made every reflection that the fondest parent could have done in a similar case; and finally decided, before he mentioned his suspicions to his sister, that since Lady Ossulston was a very charming young woman, and a descendant from one of the first families in Great Britain, if his nephew did consult him before he made her

her an offer, he would not absolutely set his face against the match.

Just as he had come to this sensible resolution, as if to reward him for having yielded to the dictates of reason, Mr. Fenwick made his proposals to his sister, with whom he was no sooner left alone, than he expressed his heartfelt joy at the prospect of felicity which seemed to be opening for her declining years, as he agreed that she could not possibly return to Spain: and then, for the first time, he mentioned the suspicions which he entertained with respect to the state of Lady Ossulston's heart.

Mrs. Ashby's sentiments were exactly similar; and she had so much to say in praise of the young widow, and appeared so highly to approve of her son's marrying an English woman, that, finally, they resolved—as they neither of them thought that he had seen her with indifference—rather

rather to encourage, than to prevent their union; admitting that the Marquis of Stanmore, who doubtless would regret being separated from his niece, was of the same way of thinking: and of this they had little doubt, as her future peace of mind might in a great measure depend upon his compliance with the first wish of her heart; though Lady Ossulston was, like her supposed admirer, absolutely independent of all controul, and at full liberty to dispose of her estates: nevertheless, Mrs. Ashby rather wished that she would retain them, as it might prove an inducement to both her and her son, now and then to revisit England.

We have, however, rather wandered from the fair object of this digression, who was certainly far from happy; but, heroine-like, she had resolved to conquer her weakness, as she styled it, or die in the attempt!—therefore, before Ferdinand's return, she came to a resolution, never to

see

see him again, except he sought her society; and, in consequence, wrote to a distant relation—whom, out of courtesy, she styled aunt—to invite herself to spend a week or ten days with her: at the expiration of which time, she rather supposed that the Spanish Nobles would be thinking of returning home.

Miss Deloraine had rather encouraged the idea of taking this opportunity to visit Mrs. Corbett; knowing that our hero had not given her cousin any reason to hope that he intended to make her an offer of his hand: nor did she absolutely, much as she loved her, wish that he ever might do so—for, in that case, their separation was inevitable. Indeed, the bare possibility of such an event taking place, was sure to bring tears into her eyes, whenever she reflected upon the matter; because, had she given her hand to Colonel Milford, a few miles only would have divided them from each other, and that was no more

than

than frequently happened; but to have the Atlantic between them, occasioned her far different sensations: she was, in consequence, almost anxious to get her beloved cousin out of the way of this attractive stranger.

Accordingly, on the day Ferdinand was expected at Mr. Fenwick's, they agreed, during breakfast, to take an early dinner with the Marquis of Stanmore— whom they must apprize of their intention to spend a fortnight with Mrs. Corbett— and then proceed to the Grove, as that lady styled her seat: not that Lady Ossulston intended to give her uncle her real reason for leaving home, at a time when she knew her company would be particularly solicited, both at his and Mr. Fenwick's seat; on the contrary, they were to attribute this sudden resolution to Mrs. Corbett being indisposed, and having very seriously requested to see them both. She certainly had mentioned

being

being very unwell, in her reply to Lady Ossulston's letter, and had expressed a hope that they would extend their week to a month.

The Marquis of Stanmore was particularly attached to the heiress of his honours and estates; therefore was not more willing to place seas between them than Miss Deloraine: still he wished to see her united to a man who was capable of making her happy, and he knew of none more likely than the one upon whom she had evidently fixed her affections—nor had she a chance of meeting with so great a match in England; the Duke de Medina, as Viceroy of Mexico, being equal to many sovereign Princes, which he knew must have its due weight upon a young mind, and he was not absurd enough to suppose that Lady Ossulston was superior to all her sex. He greatly applauded, however, the charitable motive which

induced her, at such a time, to visit Mrs. Corbett, though he easily guessed why she had chosen to leave home: he was, therefore, particularly cautious not to wound her feelings, merely hoping that they would return before the noble Spaniards left the country.

About four o'clock they accordingly left the Priory, certain of having plenty of time to perform their short journey of eighteen miles across the country before dark. The roads, however, ran heavy, and it was after five before they reached the half-way house, where they stopped to water the horses.

"We shall make the old lady wait tea!" observed Miss Deloraine.

"Then, not to put her in a bad humour, John shall ride forward to announce our approach, which will suit her stately notions of etiquette; and we must attribute

attribute our delay to the real cause, namely, the depth of these sandy roads."

The servant was in consequence dispatched, and the ladies prepared to follow him: we shall, therefore, leave them to pursue their journey, while we return to our hero, in whose motions we also wish to interest our readers.

CHAP. VII.

FERDINAND rose at an early hour on this very morning, to commence his rather longer journey; it being upwards of a hundred miles from London to Mr. Fenwick's villa, and he had resolved not to sleep upon the road. Between four and five in the afternoon, having pretty well broken the neck of his journey, and finding himself hungry, he stopped to take a hasty dinner at an inn, where he changed horses. While he was thus employed, the landlord, having learned from the servants that their master was going to Mr.

Fenwick's

Fenwick's—and the election bustle being over, the post-horses had had a little respite from their late incessant fatigue—anxious, therefore, to make the most of his noble guest, who required a great many horses — having four to his own carriage and as many more to a hack-chaise, in which Gonsalvo and another servant, who had hitherto remained in London, followed, besides three outriders—under pretence of obliging his Grace, he represented to the valet, that the post-road from his house to Mr. Fenwick's was upwards of six-and-twenty miles, and that they would be obliged to change horses; whereas, he offered to conduct them across the country, the by-roads, which were as good as any turnpike at this season, and not near so dusty, and by which means his Grace would save at least five miles.

Gonsalvo readily reported his proposal to his master, who, thinking it would be

infinitely more pleasant, and having no wish to prolong his journey unnecessarily, gave the man much greater credit than he deserved, and did not hesitate to accede to his plan. About six o'clock, therefore, he departed; the landlord ordering the postillions to set his Grace down in two hours at Mr. Fenwick's; adding, "he kept the right sort of cattle, not to let the grass grow under their feet."

Our hero paid but little attention to his vain boast, but soon began to revolve in his own mind the various occurrences in which he had been concerned since his arrival in England; and Lady Ossulston had presented herself to his thoughts more than once during the first three quarters of an hour, when a servant, upon the full gallop, passed the carriage, which roused him from his reverie—and, upon looking out of the back glass, he fancied that the man's features were familiar to him: but he had scarcely made the reflection,

endeavouring

endeavouring to recollect where he had seen him, before he turned out of the road, and made towards a very handsome house, which he should not have remarked but for this rencontre.

His curiosity being excited, he called to the postillion, to enquire to whom it belonged; and was informed, to a Mrs. Corbett, a maiden lady, of very large fortune.—"Then I was certainly mistaken in my conjectures respecting the servant, thought he, never having heard this lady mentioned either by the Marquis of Stanmore or Lady Ossulston.

He had not, however, proceeded more than a mile further, when, as the postillions were turning a bend in the road, to the left, his ears were assailed by a violent scream, which appeared to proceed from no great distance. He looked anxiously on every side, but was prevented, for a few seconds, from seeing any thing, by

the very high hedges on all sides of him; when, at the moment that a second scream, more piercing than the former, reached his ear, he turned a corner which brought him in sight of a coach and four, that appeared to have turned out of the direct road, to drive through a pool of water by the side, and immediately he heard one of his own postillions swear they would be over. The words were scarcely uttered, ere his prognostic was verified.—"Stop, stop!" eagerly cried our hero, who had got the door of the carriage open before the postillions were able to pull up, which they did nearly opposite to where the accident had happened, when springing out, regardless of being in boots, and encumbered with his clothes, he rushed into the water, which had, owing to its position, filled the carriage before (notwithstanding his speed) he was able to reach it; and, owing to the plunging of the horses, it was with difficulty that he made shift to scramble upon it, as the pool was nearly

nearly four feet deep where it laid. His heart sunk within him when he had succeeded, as he now more clearly perceived the imminent danger of those within, who, four in number, had all fallen to the bottom. Tearing open the door, he laid hold of the first who presented herself, in whom, to his no small astonishment, he recognised the features of Miss Deloraine.

"Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed, "is Lady Ossulston of the party?"

She was unable to answer his question, except by signs; but they soon confirmed the to him dreadful surmise. By this time his suite were come up, who, with the postillions, came to his assistance. To Gonsalvo's care, he therefore consigned the terrified female whom he had rescued, while he turned again to those who were still struggling within the vehicle. Another head was by this time above the

water — a second female was clinging to the side of the coach, of which she had instinctively caught hold, gasping as she was for breath. To depicture his Grace's anxiety when he perceived it was not the lovely widow, is a task much above our abilities: exerting all his strength, he forced her to leave her hold, and, instantly dragging her out, handed her to his nearest assistant, almost immediately catching hold of a third, who was deprived of both sense and motion, owing to her having been so long under water. It was, however, Lady Ossulston! Of this a single glance convinced him, though her sparkling eyes, in which he had sometimes flattered himself that he had read sentiments congenial to his own, were closed, and her complexion had lost all its bloom. Till that moment he was by no means aware of the strong hold she had upon his heart. He raised her with the utmost precaution, and made one of the men support her upon the side of the

carriage,

carriage, while he jumped down into the water, to bear her to the bank.

There was still a fourth person in the carriage; but she might have perished for our hero, whose every thought and feeling were engrossed by Lady Ossulston; though, had he taken time for reflection, he would have recollected that he saw another person, while raising her Ladyship: one of the postillions, who, though very innocently, had been in a great measure the occasion of the accident, kept calling out for Mrs. Pennel, her Ladyship's woman, who was also rescued in time from the vehicle.

Thus were Lady Ossulston's intentions of flying from this dangerous young Spaniard, rendered totally abortive, even in the first instance; as our hero seemed designed to be the peculiar instrument

which Providence chose to employ whenever she was in any danger. But while we leave him busily employed in endeavouring to recover his fair companion, we will briefly inform our readers how the accident happened, which would very likely have proved fatal to some of the party, but for the opportune and critical arrival of the Duke de Medina.

The off-wheel horse had been very anxious after water when they stopped to refresh at the half-way house, where the postillions refused to let him have what he thought *quantum sufficit*. The beast, therefore, having formerly been indulged in his favourite propensity at this very pool, did not chuse to pass it, absolutely refusing to proceed. Her Ladyship naturally enquired in what the dispute between him and his driver originated; and, having a great feeling for the four-footed part of her suite, she desired, if no danger

danger was likely to arise from their driving into the pool, that he might be gratified.

The postillions had frequently driven through, therefore were sure they could with safety do so now, and accordingly turned in, without entertaining any apprehension of meeting with an accident; but having nearly reached the middle before they pulled up, the ladies called out, upon perceiving the coach incline very much towards one side. This, the postillion saw, upon turning his head, was occasioned by part of the bank having fallen in; still he did not conceive that they were in any danger, but of course, in consequence of the orders he received, he endeavoured to move forward, before the thirsty horse found himself satisfied; he therefore once more absolutely refused to stir—and when they did succeed in getting him into motion, he was in so bad a humour, and leaned so much from his

his driver, that he pulled the carriage into a much more perilous situation, which occasioned the first scream the Duke heard; and all the horses being more or less startled at the sudden alarm, they gave the coach a quick jerk, which laid it on one side in the water. Still no one was absolutely to blame; for, had not the bank given way, and of this the men were not aware, there would have been no sort of danger: and even then, had the horse been more obedient to the whip and rein, they would have escaped unhurt.

Miss Deloraine was the first who recovered her speech; and the apparent danger of her cousin, who was still insensible in the Duke's arms, appeared to rouse all her faculties. His Grace was calling out for salts, hartshorn, or any kind of restoratives likely to answer the desired end, which made her recollect that she had a bottle of *eau-de-luce* in her

pocket,

pocket, with which she instantly presented him, while she loosened the collar of her habit-shirt, and did all in her power to restore her once more to her senses.

Their joint efforts proved successful; and at the expiration of a couple of minutes, which had appeared hours to her impatient friends, she began to display signs of life, and, after a few sighs, opened her eyes, which having fixed upon the very person that she had been taking such pains to avoid, she absolutely started, appearing to doubt whether she was restored to her senses, or whether what she saw, was not the effect of illusion, till she heard his well-known voice, and tender entreaties that she would endeavour to compose herself, to which he added repeated assurances that every body was safe, till she faintly articulated—"Good Heavens! how came you here, your Grace?" putting out her hand to her cousin, making an effort at the same time

to disengage herself from the encircling arms which still supported her.

"Sit still for a few minutes!" said her still trembling cousin.

She mechanically obeyed her injunctions, enquiring, "Where are the servants?"

"Quite safe, I give you my word of honour!" replied her now animated preserver, in whose countenance she fancied that she read what was passing in his heart; and, when he returned his thanks to the Supreme Power for having sent him so opportunely to *her* assistance, totally forgetting that she was not alone, she found it impossible to restrain her tears, but made a second motion to rise, while she faltered out—

"We can never sufficiently thank your Grace; but for Heaven's sake, do not let us detain you a moment longer, as the humanity which induced you to endeavour and to succeed in saving the lives of a few useless beings, may very probably endanger

endanger one of much greater importance to the world in general."

"You are still unable to stand, Lady Ossulston, and your attendants are as yet unable to afford you any assistance. I must entreat you would not entertain any apprehensions upon my account, as I am absolutely partial to cold bathing at this season."

"I believe you never consider personal danger, when the life of a fellow-creature is at stake, and you seem doomed to save me from an untimely end: indeed, I must appear to take a delight in unnecessarily endangering my life, for I certainly ordered the servants to drive into the pool, which had so nearly proved fatal to us all; though I positively was not aware of the danger—nay, I think the men assured me we should run no risk."

His Grace having heard the postillions explain, and point out to what their misfortune was owing, immediately exculpated them

them from having wilfully endangered her life, greatly commending the humane motive which had induced her to venture into the water.

"You wish to reconcile me to myself," she replied; "but where is Thomas? Surely he has not met with any misfortune!"

She had scarcely expressed her fears for his safety, ere he came galloping up, evidently very much frightened when he perceived what had happened, and excused himself for staying behind, by acknowledging that he had met with a relation in the last village, who had detained him for a few minutes.

"Very well!" rejoined his indulgent mistress, happy to see that he was safe; "only take care another time, when you are out with the carriage, never to lose sight of it, under any pretence. Try to assist in raising it now."

This,

This, the man instantly did; and the moment his back was turned, she remarked—"that his delay was very naturally accounted for; though they might all have lost their lives, owing to his having been detained so very *mal-apropos.*"

Her Ladyship being by this time perfectly recovered, Ferdinand proposed that she and Miss Deloraine should immediately get into his carriage, and proceed to the nearest house of entertainment in those quarters.

"We are going to a relation of mine, your Grace; a Mrs. Corbett, whose house is, if not in sight, within a mile."

"Then it was your courier whom I met. I thought I recollected his face, and that induced me to enquire to whom the house he was making for, belonged. As I was unacquainted with the name, I presumed that I had been mistaken in my con-

conjectures respecting the servant; but let me entreat you would proceed to that lady's without loss of time, as I am fearful you will be very material sufferers, if you remain much longer in your wet clothes."

They could not, however, be prevailed upon to get into the postchaises in such a dripping, not to say dirty, condition; alledging that the coach would soon be raised, and they were sure that it had fallen too soft, to have received any material injury.

The Duke still insisted upon their making use of his carriage—till, by way of compromising the matter, her Ladyship agreed to go forward in the hack-chaise which was in his suite, observing—"she could make the innkeeper a proper compensation for spoiling the lining;" but declared that she would not even stir

in

in that carriage, if his Grace did not take the middle seat—as he would not find it very agreeable to change his clothes *a la bellc etoile,* and there was no house so near as Mrs. Corbett's.

The hack-chaise was therefore turned about, and they all three got in; his Grace desiring his attendants to afford her Ladyship's all the assistance in their power, and then to follow him with his carriage, whither he was going. These orders given, the postillions made the best of their way to the Grove.

"What will my good old relation think," exclaimed the once more lively Lady Ossulston, "when she comes out to welcome three such dripping figures?"

"I wish," replied her cousin, "we may not have her death to answer for! In the first place, she will have been waiting tea for us, for upwards of an hour; and

and then to see us arrive in so strange a manner, and appearing to have been drawn through some neighbouring horse-pond, will certainly occasion her a degree of alarm, that she will scarcely overcome during our stay."

That Lady Ossulston should have chosen such a time to visit this distant relation, rather mortified our hero, who had hoped that she would have been among the first to welcome his return into the county of ——; yet thus to be going out of the way, as if purposely to avoid meeting or seeing him, as she must know that he was expected at Mr. Fenwick's, was rather extraordinary. Then again, vanity whispered that she might be actuated by the most prudential motives. This conjecture, as he had made no absolute declaration of his sentiments before he left ——, was still more flattering. Wishing to be satisfied, he hinted the hopes he had entertained

of

of being permitted to pay his respects to the ladies, if not that evening, the next morning, at Ossulston House; and now, for the first time, enquired after his mother, uncle, and other kind friends.

Miss Deloraine was as anxious to give the Duke to understand why they had chosen this time to visit Mrs. Corbett, as he was to learn what had induced the fair widow to leave home; though she wished her intimation to be conveyed in the most delicate terms—by no means chusing her cousin should suppose that she meant to betray the secret of her heart: she therefore gaily said—

"Lady Ossulston, finding herself tired of home, recollected that she owed Mrs. Corbett a visit; and, having rather suddenly resolved to enliven the old lady's solitude, they had set off too hastily, to allow them to take a personal leave of Mrs.

Mrs. Ashby, or the party assembled at Mr. Fenwick's. Indeed, she thought it very probable that the latter gentleman would have dissuaded them from fulfilling their charitable intention; Mrs. Corbett not ranking among his favourites. Lord Stanmore had not, however, objected to their devoting a few days to her amusement; conscious, perhaps, that they should soon be glad to leave her nodding groves and purling streams, and that her conversation would only give them a new zest for the company of their friends. Besides, his Lordship frequently said that women were often more severely punished by being allowed to follow the bent of their own inclinations, than by having them restrained. Not that they were actuated by caprice, in wishing to afford the old lady a little pleasure; though it should appear that they were to be rather severely punished for having left home so abruptly—witness their overturn."

Their stopping at the grand entrance into Mrs. Corbett's house, prevented the Duke from making any reply; though he perfectly understood every thing that Miss Deloraine hoped he would do, and thought himself, as all heroes do, when convinced that their passion is returned by the lady of their choice, one of the happiest of mortals.

CHAP. VIII.

THE moment the door was opened, the Duke handed out his companions, whose dripping garments excited the greatest astonishment among the servants, who stood ready to receive them. As for Mrs. Corbett, she could not conceive what visitors she might expect, when she perceived the hack-chaise driving round the sweep—having been informed, upon the arrival of the courier, that Lady Ossulston and Miss Deloraine were upon the road, in the former's coach; she therefore took her station at a window, whence she could see

see who alighted. With our hero she was totally unacquainted, and he certainly did not appear to be dressed for a ceremonious visit. But the moment she caught sight of the now shivering Lady Ossulston, whose wet clothes perfectly accounted for her pallid looks, she hurried into the hall, exclaiming, as she advanced—

"Merciful God! my dear child, what has befallen you?"

"No very great misfortune, my dear aunt," was the reply; "we have only been taking a cold bath."

"A cold bath, niece! what, in your clothes?"

"Yes, aunt; and, as there were gentlemen present, you will allow it was but proper; but pray suffer us to approach a fire, and then we will astonish you with a recital of the perils and dangers with which we have been encompassed between Ossulston House and the Grove."

Notwithstanding the season, Mrs. Corbett generally had a fire in some of her apartments, towards which she constantly retreated the moment the sun went down; and to a very good one in the library, she now hastily led the way, when Lady Ossulston introduced his Grace to her in due style and form. His name was perfectly familiar to her; all the town and country newspapers, for the last fortnight, having been full of his miraculous escape, &c. &c. It may therefore be supposed that she gave him a very gracious reception, and then impatiently enquired, how they all came to be in such a state.

"Where are your women, my dear niece? You will certainly catch your death of cold! Do let me lead you into my dressing-room; you cannot too soon divest yourselves of those wet garments."

So said the Duke.

"I am quite of your opinion, aunt," rejoined her Ladyship; "but suffer me

first

first to inform you, that but for the Duke de Medina, neither I nor Pennel should ever have reached your house alive; as we were overturned in the large pool, about a mile hence. One of the men-servants I had sent forwards, you already know; and the other having by accident remained behind, we should very probably all four—but, at all events, Pennel and myself—have given up the ghost, if the Duke had not, by mere accident, driven up at the very moment we were laid low: and I need not add, that his humanity induced him to take a cold bath, in coming to our assistance. And now I am ready to attend you to your dressing-room; for the sooner we make a little alteration in our dress, the more comfortable we shall feel."

"I believe you will, my dear child; for I protest the bare recital of the danger to which you have been exposed, has chilled all the blood in my veins."

"Then you must, indeed, have a fellow feeling for us, aunt."

"Bless me, how can you joke, niece? Come along, or I am sure you will be laid up for a month."

"Then we had better have been drowned at once, aunt; for I abhor the bare idea of a lingering death. The Duke can make his toilet here by the fire, while we go and inspect your wardrobe; as I am sure we shall not find a single thing we can put on, when the coach does arrive."

"You had much better all three go to bed," was the reply; "I will be answerable for their being well aired, and a good bason of sack whey will do you much more good than tea. Shall I send for Dr. ——?"

"By no means, aunt. I am very well; or, at least, shall be so, as soon as I have changed my clothes."

The old lady, however, insisted upon their going to bed, at least for a couple of hours, till she saw whether any further ill effects were likely to arise from their misfortune, declaring that she should not be

be herself again for a week.—"I hope you mean to discharge those awkward fellows, who ran you into such danger," she continued; "but I will not keep you talking here a minute longer!" ringing the bell for her own woman. But, before she made her appearance, the Duke's carriage and suite, followed by the coach, drove into the back court.

As the ladies were retiring, Mrs. Corbett promising to send his Grace's servants to him, he wished the younger ladies a good evening; telling them "that he meant to pursue his journey as soon as he had changed his dress."

Mrs. Corbett declared, "it was being very imprudent!—he had much better go to bed, if only for an hour; it might prevent him from catching cold."

He assured her, "that he entertained no fears of becoming a sufferer, from having merely done what any clown, who had been equally near, would have as

easily achieved. Besides, he was expected at Mr. Fenwick's; and even, were he to send his mother and uncle word why he had stopped at her hospitable mansion, they would fancy he had met with some accident."

Lady Ossulston did not join in persuading him to stay, though she made an effort to renew her thanks, and to wish him a pleasant ride.

The Duke, approaching her, took her passive hand, which he raised to his lips, his eyes making that declaration which his tongue had not yet uttered; while he hoped "she would allow him to make his personal enquiries after her health the next morning."

As his looks were far more expressive th n his words, Lady Ossulston with difficulty restrained her full heart from overflowing at her eyes; and, fearful of betraying

betraying her feelings, she gently withdrew her hand, and hurried out of the room, without replying to his last speech, unperceived by either her aunt or cousin; the latter having drawn the old lady on one side, in hopes of affording his Grace an opportunity of setting her beloved friend's mind at ease: but, turning about upon hearing the door open, she saw the Duke, lost in thought, looking after her friend! She broke in upon his reverie, by asking—"Is Lady Ossulston gone up-stairs?"

"I believe she is, Ma'am; and, if I should not have the advantage of seeing either of you again this evening, will you make my best respects to your fair cousin, and tell her that I hope to find you both perfectly restored by to-morrow, as I mean to ride over in the course of the forenoon, to see how you are."

Miss Deloraine was rather surprised at her friend's abrupt departure; yet she was

induced to form the most favourable conjectures from his Grace's implied promise to see them again so speedily. She, therefore, freely presented him her hand, thanking him, in the most feeling terms, for having, as she averred, "saved the life of her best friend, who, she hoped, would be quite recovered by the next morning;" adding, "I hope you will have a pleasant journey, your Grace, if you are resolved to go forward!"

Our hero bowed an affirmative to her half question, and she followed her cousin.

Mrs. Corbett thought that they had both withdrawn rather abruptly, yet took no notice; but, before she went in search of them, she sent for her butler, to whom she requested his Grace would give orders for whatever her house afforded; as he ought to take something warm immediately, since he was averse to taking any other

other precaution to preserve himself from cold.

To oblige her, he ordered some mulled wine, and she hurried after the young ladies; forgetting how much it was past her usual tea hour.—As they knew that they should not have appeared to much advantage in any clothes which she could have provided them with, they consented to oblige her, by going to bed, and following her prescription respecting the whey; but chose to remain in the same apartment, alledging that they were not inclined to sleep.

They were no sooner alone, than Miss Deloraine enquired "why her Ladyship had left the room so abruptly? and why she had found her in tears?"

"I cannot bear to be teazed," was the reply. "I hope you made up for my want of politeness! What did his Grace say to you?"

"Well, I am now fully convinced that I was never tormented with *la belle passion!* which I begin to think a very fortunate circumstance, as it certainly makes fools of us all; for even the Duke de Medina looked exceedingly silly, and hardly knew whether he had not better have followed you up-stairs, till I roused him from his reverie, by enquiring where you were gone."

"But what did he say?"

"Why, he called you my fair cousin, and stammered out something about to-morrow."

"Then, will he come to-morrow, do you think?"

"No—you do not wish he should."

"How can you torment me so?"

Thus they went on; Lady Ossulston dwelling upon our hero's late exertions in her behalf, with increasing pleasure—as the recapitulation taught her to believe she was by no means indifferent to him: and

and what could be more flattering to her feelings?—At last, they heard the rolling of a carriage; when, notwithstanding she had just taken a half-pint bason of her aunt's cordial, which was intended to promote perspiration, she jumped out of bed, and ran to the window, merely wrapped in a dressing-gown, when, hastily putting by the curtain, she caught the Duke's eyes full upon the window! Mrs. Corbett was standing by him upon the lawn, pointing out the various prospects worthy notice, but did not see her Ladyship, who instantly retreated; while our hero, very much gratified by the momentary glance which he had had of her features, stepped into his carriage, and once more set out for Mr. Fenwick's, leaving the fair Eudora in far better spirits, than when she left home.

CHAP. IX.

DURING a drive of nearly two hours, Ferdinand had sufficient time allowed him for reflection. That he was beloved, did not admit of a doubt; nevertheless, he foresaw that some obstacles might arise to prevent their union. Such a proposal might not meet the Marquis of Stanmore's approbation. Lady Ossulston was undoubtedly her own mistress; still she might not chuse to act in direct opposition to so kind an uncle. Could he have agreed to spend any part of his time in England, the Marquis would not, he flattered

flattered himself, have hesitated to bestow his niece upon him; he was, however, resolved to make his wishes immediately known to his own and her Ladyship's friends, being anxious to have the matter decided one way or other. Besides, his stay in England was now very limited; and, should his proposals be rejected, it would be short indeed—as he should, in that case, indubitably leave the county of —— in a very few days, instead of remaining a few weeks with his mother: as, though he foresaw that, were his proposals to be refused, he should for a time regret that he had ever been introduced to her Ladyship; still he conceived that would be far preferable to rendering a whole family miserable—not excluding the woman of his choice, who might, after a time, repine at being totally separated from all her early connexions, which even the splendour of her lot might not prevent her from regretting.

It

It was near ten before he reached Mr. Fenwick's, who had assembled many of his friends to welcome his arrival. They had begun to think that he made it late; but reflected that they were at a great distance from London, and that he might not have started early, or might have been delayed upon the road. His arrival put an end to their conjectures. Having suffered him to receive the compliments of the company, Mr. Fenwick remarked that "he had not heard him enquire for Lady Ossulston or Miss Deloraine, though the Marquis of Stanmore and Sir Henry were present; and he had expected that he would have been very much disappointed at not seeing those ladies!"

"Then I can very easily, my good Sir, account for my apparent want of politeness, in neither enquiring after their health, nor remarking their absence, having seen them within the last three hours; I was therefore prepared, for what I should otherwise

otherwise have considered as a very great disappointment."

An explanation of course immediately took place; though our hero made as light as he possibly could of the accident, consistent with his regard for truth.

Lord Stanmore was convinced that his niece would come to an untimely end, in spite of his repeated cautions.

The Duke de L'Infantado thought "it was a great pity so beautiful a young woman, whose fine features were her least merit, had not a proper and a natural protector!" glancing his eyes first towards his nephew, then towards Lord Stanmore, which convinced the former that they had not only discovered, but that they also approved of their mutual regard, which afforded him a degree of satisfaction, that none but a lover, whose hopes have not

yet

yet been confirmed, can feel. He therefore resolved not to delay communicating to them the state of his heart.

They soon sat down to supper; after which, the servants, having withdrawn, the master of the house gave "Lady Ossulston," declaring that no one rejoiced more than himself at her fortunate escape, and expressing his hopes that she would soon return among them.

Lord Stanmore spoke to the same effect, and the Duke de L'Infantado asked his nephew, "if her Ladyship had told him how long she meant to remain at the Grove?"

"She had not," he replied; "but as he intended to ride over the next morning, to enquire after her's and Miss Deloraine's health, he would, if they authorized him, put the question in their joint names."

"You

"You have my free permission," rejoined Mr. Fenwick; "and, were it not for the regret I should feel, were I to lose her agreeable society, I should almost wish you would ask her one question more, in order to induce her to give us as much of her company as possible; though I hope I have effectually guarded against being ever again subject to *ennui*."

"Nay, now you wish to puzzle me," replied Ferdinand, who was really at a loss to comprehend the conclusion of his speech; neither his mother nor uncle having mentioned Mr. Fenwick's proposals to him in their letters. Indeed, they had told that gentleman they should not, as they wished him to be a witness of the agreeable surprise which they knew they would occasion his intended son-in-law; and the good man was anxious to see how they would be received. So, in answer to our hero's remark, he rejoined—

"I find I have not made myself understood; yet I dare say your Grace has

not

not forgotten that, nine days since, you saw me returned Member for ——, for which honour I have chiefly to thank yourself; and, in nine more, I do not despair—except indeed your Grace forbid the banns—of becoming a bridegroom."

Ferdinand looked first at the speaker, then at Mrs. Ashby, whose heightened colour, added to his uncle's smiles, soon made him perfectly understand Mr. Fenwick's meaning; to whom he instantly said—

"Far from forbidding the banns, my good Sir, I beg you will remain assured of every assistance in my power—admitting that I am authorized to plead your cause with the lady you have selected for your partner through life—as I am vain enough to hope you will return me the favour; and I must acknowledge that I should feel very happy, were I permitted to perform Benedict on the same day you mean to enact that character."

"Then,

"Then, since we are both agreed so far," resumed Mr. Fenwick, "we have only to secure the ladies' consent, to render us both objects of general envy. I depend much upon your Grace's eloquence, as I have the assurance to aspire to the honour of calling you my son-in-law."

"Depend upon my doing every thing in my power to accelerate the moment; as I shall glory in styling so good a man, father!" extending his hand, though evidently doubtful whether his kind host was in earnest, till his uncle confirmed all he had said, congratulating him upon his mother's approaching nuptials, who, he observed, would be infinitely more agreeably situated in England, than she would ever again be in Spain, after such an absence, and after having married a foreigner, and not of the first rank.

Mr. Fenwick thanked both gentlemen for their good opinion and kind wishes, and

and then requested that the Duke de Medina would make haste and select a lady whom he thought worthy of bearing his name; as he did not feel inclined to postpone his own nuptials, except indeed he could reasonably hope that his Grace meant to enter the holy pale at the same time.

"I can hardly hope to do that so soon as you mention, my dear Sir, even should the Marquis of Stanmore do me the favour to plead my cause with his niece; for I have positively not had sufficient courage as yet, to address her upon the subject myself."

"That is coming to the point at once!" cried the delighted Fenwick. "I knew you had lost your heart, and I guessed who was the thief, whom I promise to address in your behalf; as I believe, guilty-like, she ran away, for fear she should be called to an account respecting the stolen goods."

The

The Marquis of Stanmore, in the politest terms, expressed his sense of the honour which the Duke intended his family; assuring him not only of his consent, but of his entire approbation of proposals so much above his expectations: though a tear started in his eye, while he said--"I own I shall part with her very reluctantly."

A more detailed explanation now took place; and many necessary arrangements were talked over, till they separated at a late, or, more properly speaking, an early hour in the morning: it having been agreed that the Marquis should accompany his Grace to the Grove, when he went to enquire after the ladies' health, as our hero particularly wished him to have a little private conversation with Lady Ossulston, before he publicly declared himself her lover, which he was resolved to do, or not, according to his Lordship's report.

CHAP. X.

NINE days having elapsed since the termination of the election, and Colonel Milford's departure, the inhabitants of —— had ceased to wonder or comment upon either circumstance. Indeed, a sort of dead calm appeared to have succeeded the late bustle, which was greatly increased by the absence of the Spanish Nobles, Mrs. Ashby, and Mr. Fenwick: not that Mrs. Hesham was idle in her endeavours to procure (or even, when she failed in that respect, in fabricating) news. Daily did she visit Mr. Wildham, who, appearing

appearing to have forgotten his former dislike of her, was even more than usually conversant; nor was Catherine more reserved—not that they either of them gave her any intimation of what was going forward at the Member's villa; though Mrs Ashby had written Catherine word of her approaching marriage, and had requested that she would impart the intelligence to their best friend, who, with herself, were, if they chose, to be Mr. Fenwick's constant inmates, or, at all events, his frequent guests. And, perhaps, no two people rejoiced more sincerely in their happy prospects, though they were never their theme, except when they were *tête-à-tête*; and Mrs. Hesham would have been the last person to whom they would have communicated what they knew.

The Spanish Nobles, however, afforded them and her ample subject for conversation, as she descanted very learnedly

upon their joint pedigrees, declaring that they were both descended from the first families in Old Castile, which were reckoned superior even to that of their reigning Monarch, who was a Bourbon—therefore of French extraction; and she had heard her grandfather say, that the noble Castilians were proverbially greater than their King.

Wildham perfectly agreed with her, observing, that "the Duke de Medina's valet might challenge many of our British Nobles, in point of birth; as he was, according to his own account—indeed, he had made it very clear to him—descended in a direct line from Gonsalvo de Cordova, the famous Conqueror of the Moors."

Mrs. Hesham did not doubt it; "there was dignity both in his looks and manners!" but she was astonished that he had not mentioned the circumstance to

her

her—as she had frequently entered into discourse with him respecting his master's family, during the Duke's absence, which might have afforded him an opportunity to give her a hint that his own was little less, if at all inferior, in point of rank. This made her wonder at his having condescended to accept of the post he held in his Grace's suite; as many of his countrymen would rather starve than lower their dignity.

"A very just remark," Wildham agreed; "but *Don* Gonsalvo did not consider his as an humble station—it being customary in Spain, but still more so in Spanish America, for men of the Duke de Medina's consequence, to employ decayed gentlemen about their person: indeed, except assisting his Grace to dress and undress, he did no earthly thing, and was nearly as much looked up to by the other servants as their master himself was.

Still he was by no means surprised at his not having mentioned his pretensions to family to her, as he knew that English valets could very seldom boast of their extraction; therefore, he might be fearful that she would not credit his tale—though he had heard him sincerely lament, that a lady of her respectability and honourable descent should have been so much reduced in her circumstances, to which he attributed her having so long remained single; as he presumed, owing to her want of fortune, she had never had an offer which she could have accepted without greatly lowering herself. He therefore highly commended the spirit which had induced her to reject such alliances."

We shall not pretend to relate all the fine compliments which Mr. Wildham invented for Gonsalvo: we shall only say that, shrewd as was the old gossip, self-love and an inordinate degree of vanity

rendered

rendered her completely his dupe. Indeed, few people could deceive her more adroitly than Wildham, whenever he wished to render her ridiculous, or to make her propagate any absurdity, and was not in company likely to excite his risibility, while he was thus employed; and this time, he even went so far as to declare that "*Don* Gonsalvo had frequently wished he was as rich as his master, for her sake; though he had told him, he was already what he should once have thought very rich, as he possessed between two and three hundred a year, independent of his lucrative place."

Never had the vain old gossip been so much flattered, who replied, "Why, you don't tell me so, neighbour! surely, you joke! Three hundred a year is a very pretty income, particularly in Spain."

"So say I, Mrs. Hesham; and I thought you knew me better than to suppose I ever joked about my friends."

 "Nay,

"Nay, nay, neighbour, I am sure I meant no offence; I only hope I shall have an opportunity of thanking Don Gonsalvo for the good opinion he seems to entertain concerning me, before he leaves England."

Mr. Wildham became answerable for his paying his respects to her, if (as he supposed he would) he returned to ——.

Mrs. Hesham now found plenty of occupation in trumpeting forth Gonsalvo's birth and riches, which no one ventured to dispute, for fear of falling into the same error that they had done respecting his master. Besides, as none of her friends pretended, like herself, to be at all acquainted with Spanish customs and manners, they thought it by no means improbable that the attendant of so great a man might be of noble extraction, and as rich as Mrs. Hesham reported, who could

neither

neither talk nor think of any other person, from the time Wildham had chosen to thus divert himself at her expence.

All that had hitherto been learned concerning Colonel Milford, was from one of his father's homeward bound Captains, who had, by the help of his glass, recognised him on board the Dutch fishing smack; but who had been unable to believe his eyes, till, upon his arrival in port, he learned that he had not been deceived. The skipper was steering for Flushing, when he caught sight of them.

The once proud Merchant was now most completely humbled; nay, he did not scruple to acknowledge to his friends, that he had met with no more than he deserved; as he was greatly to blame for having so entirely spoiled his son. However, he hoped that his late misfortunes had worked a thorough reformation in his

way of thinking, and they certainly appeared to have made a great alteration in his conduct, as he immediately set about rebuilding John Glenton's house, which he declared should be his, rent free, as long as he lived. He also made Captain Munford a handsome present, and promoted him to the command of one of the first ships in his employ, and even promised to fit him out a privateer, should there be a war. In short, he seemed only anxious to atone for the past, by doing all the good in his power, addressing every one with the greatest affability, who, in return, treated him with more respect than they had ever done, before he had met with these misfortunes. His equals became every day more sensible of his innate worth, and all applauded the line of conduct which he appeared to have adopted from principle; therefore, vied with each other in endeavouring to make him forget that he had ever had a son,

by

by redoubling their politeness and attention towards him. His fortune was still very considerable, and his credit by no means suffered by his son's baseness; indeed, he had always been punctual in all his dealings, but a too long uninterrupted run of good fortune had nearly hardened his heart, and perverted his principles. This little check was therefore a fortunate circumstance; as it roused him in time from that apathy, which is but too frequently the attendant upon great riches.

Mr. Burton, though he would much rather he had been totally ruined, went with the stream; and, proud of following the example of his superiors, was among the first to renew his former intimacy with the Merchant: a circumstance that Mrs. Hesham rather prided herself upon having brought about—at least, so she persuaded Mr. Milford; though, in fact, she had

done all in her power to widen the breach, unanimity among the inhabitants of —— being by no means conducive to her interest, as it made her trade slack. She however contrived, as usual, to render herself a welcome guest at both houses, by retailing to the ladies whatever Wildham amused her with; and as Milford would now have deemed it a sin to doubt even of the noble extraction of our hero's horses, had such a point been insisted upon, he greatly assisted Wildham's plan by declaring himself convinced of Gonsalvo's being a man of consequence; observing, with some truth, that "the decayed Spanish Nobility generally sought employment in the families of their superiors, and where could Gonsalvo have been better situated?—for his master was going out Viceroy of Peru, where he would most probably provide for him, according to his birth."

This,

This, Wildham had also hinted to the old gossip, who soon saw, in imagination, *Don Gonsalvo* a General Officer in the service of his Most Catholic Majesty; nor did she despair, but in time he would increase his slender fortune.

Such was the situation of affairs at ——, when our hero returned to Mr. Fenwick's villa, after having a second time rescued Lady Ossulston from a watery grave.

CHAP. XI.

DURING the night, both our hero, his uncle, and the Marquis of Stanmore had thought of several things, which it would be proper should be done, admitting that Lady Ossulston consented to accompany Ferdinand to South America, which they talked over during their long drive; for such it appeared to the Duke de Medina, who actually changed colour when they drove past the pool, where her Ladyship had been overturned the day before. He pointed out the situation of the

the carriage to his companions, acknowledging that, had he chanced to have been five minutes later, he much doubted whether her Ladyship would ever have recovered.

The Marquis declared "he ought to be regarded as his niece's guardian angel, this having been the second time that he had so opportunely flown to her assistance; therefore hoped she would remain single for life, except she bestowed her hand and heart upon him, who had twice so nobly rescued her from the most perilous situations, at the imminent risk of becoming a victim to his wish to serve her."

Lady Ossulston had not slept very well: not that she felt any inconvenience from her late accident, but she was ill at ease. Her future happiness appeared at stake; and what can be more perplexing to a feeling delicate mind, than the doubts

which she could not help entertaining respecting the Duke's sentiments. In vain Miss Deloraine endeavoured to rally her into better spirits, by prognosticating that the brave knight, for whom she sighed, was all impatience to throw himself at her feet, and to make her an offer of his hand. She only should therefore be to be pitied; for she foresaw that she was upon the eve of losing her best friend: but the certainty she should entertain of her being happy in any clime with such a man, would greatly contribute to her consolation—though she found it impossible to disperse the starting tears, which filled her eyes, in consequence of her own very natural surmises.

Lady Ossulston, nearly as much affected, flung her arms round her neck (they were *tête-à tête* in their dressing-room), and mingled her tears with those of her affectionate cousin, when, upon raising

raising their heads — happening to be standing near a window, which commanded a view of the road leading to the house — they perceived a carriage advancing towards the great gates, which, when near enough, they discovered to be Lord Stanmore's coach, in the room of the elegant postchaise that they were prepared to expect, which put such a damp upon the spirits of each, that they were absolutely at a loss what to say or think.

Lady Ossulston having been led to form the most favourable conjectures, her disappointment was proportionably the greater. Anxious, however, if possible, to conceal her agitation and mortification, she exclaimed, stifling a sigh, "Well, what signifies? we shall spend our lives together, Fanny, instead of being separated; therefore, I am sure you will not repine, and it would be very ungrateful in me!" though the words stuck in her throat,

throat, and a few unbidden tears would steal down her cheeks, while pacing the room, in hopes of concealing them, saying, "I presume the Duke has caught cold; so he has sent my uncle, whom I suppose he has alarmed by an exaggerated account of our danger, to see whether we have survived our accident."

"In that case, you would certainly pity his Grace, Eudora?" replied the still doubting Miss Deloraine.

"Possibly I might; but did not he say he would come himself?" hastily demanded her Ladyship.

"I understood him so; but if he is ill——"

"Ill indeed! if his feelings were similar to mine—— But enough of the subject; never mention his name to me again, I request."

"You may depend upon my obedience. I shall leave him to make excuses for himself!" replied Miss Deloraine, with a smile, who, having kept her station at the

window,

window, had perceived our hero looking towards the house, as the carriage was turning a corner.

Lady Ossulston hastened towards her—"What is it you mean, Fanny?"

"That the Duke de Medina will be here in less than a minute! so pray dry your eyes, or I shall be accused of having been scolding you."

Her Ladyship anxiously turned to the window; and, though she could not see who was in the coach, she perceived that there was more than one gentleman; she instantly therefore ran into the adjoining apartment, to wash her eyes, and to endeavour to compose her countenance.

As Mrs. Corbett was in the saloon, expecting the Duke, and supposed the young ladies were still at their toilets, they did not hurry down stairs, though, while

while there remained a doubt upon her Ladyship's mind, she found it impossible to be stationary for more than three seconds, and had scarcely allowed herself time to bathe her eyes, ere she flew to a window, whence, unperceived, she could see the party alight. But even then, notwithstanding she had had a full view of the Duke, and had declared that she would never again so hastily accuse her friends of negligence, she was still tormented with doubts and fears, which rendered it impossible for her to compose her agitated spirits; as she presumed that this interview would decide her fate. She therefore resolved to scrutinize the Duke's looks very narrowly.—"Why had his uncle and her's accompanied him?"

"To enquire how we do," replied her cousin; "or, perhaps, to do the honours of your admirer's modesty."

She was still speaking, when one of their women came, in Mrs. Corbett's name,

name, to let them know who was in the saloon.

"Then let us go down immediately, Fanny," cried her impatient Ladyship, "for fear my uncle should think we are, or have been indisposed."

Down therefore they went; though, owing to her want of rest, recent agitation, and remaining doubts, she by no means looked so well as, from Mrs. Corbett's account, the gentlemen hoped to have found her. Our hero's visible anxiety, however, soon restored her colour, while she assured him, "she was sensible of nothing but a want of words to acknowledge her obligations towards him."

Having received the congratulations of the other gentlemen upon her recent escape, and Mrs. Corbett having amused them with an account of her surprise, subsequent

subsequent terror, &c. Lord Stanmore requested a few minutes' private audience of his niece, who, though rather surprised, immediately accompanied him into an adjoining apartment, where, according to his promise to our hero, he entered upon the delicate commission entrusted to him; speaking in terms of the highest approbation of his Grace, whose proposals he thought did both her and her family the greatest honour; though he acknowledged that he should greatly regret being deprived of her society: therefore requested that she would, in a matter of such importance to her future happiness, be wholly guided by her own feelings and judgment; as his Grace could not enter into any engagements to spend much, if any, of his time in England, though, should she dislike South America, he would very willingly resign the distinguished post his Monarch had conferred upon him, and fix his residence in Spain.

Lady

Lady Ossulston was convinced that even the uncultivated forests of North America would prove an agreeable residence with the man of her choice, therefore entertained no fears of finding the more pleasant climate of Mexico disagreeable in the same company; of course, she readily acknowledged her regard for the future, or rather present Viceroy, who she hoped would never have cause to regret having twice saved her life: and, as she judged of his feelings by her own, and did not wish him to suppose that she required any persuasion to accept of his noble offer, she requested, with that inherent frankness for which she had ever been distinguished, that he might be immediately entreated to join them, since she was as anxious to pronounce, as he could be to hear, his doom, which she wished to do in her uncle's presence.

In about ten minutes, therefore, his Grace was summoned to learn his fate; and

and as it was rather sooner than he expected, he hoped his suit had been favourably received.

Mrs. Corbett was at a loss to guess to what all these private conferences tended, but could not very well put the question to the Duke de L'Infantado, who did not feel inclined to anticipate Lord Stanmore or Lady Ossulston in breaking the agreeable news to her; as, like his nephew, he presumed that the fair widow did not intend to doom him to despair.

Miss Deloraine was still less anxious to gratify her visible curiosity, though she relieved her in a great measure from the irksome task of entertaining a total stranger, when, on a sudden, the real truth darted across the old lady's mind; and, as she had no right to expect to be consulted in an affair of such importance, not being sufficiently nearly related to Lady Ossulston (though that lady called her

her *aunt*), to render it necessary to pay her such a compliment, she felt very much gratified at the possibility which she conceived there existed of her being soon able to address a Duchess as niece. The return of the Marquis of Stanmore put the matter beyond a doubt, as he took upon himself to inform her of his niece's approaching nuptials; and, though she declared that she greatly regretted his Grace being a foreigner, still his high rank, and the distinguished post he was to hold in South America, reconciled her to parting with her dear Eudora.

As for what passed between the lovers, after they were left *tête-à-tête*, we shall leave to the imagination of our readers. Lady Ossulston merely hoped, when our hero pressed his suit rather too ardently, perhaps, considering this was his first visit as a lover, "that she should be allowed a few months for reflection, before she,

as he seemed to expect, fixed upon the wedding-day."

To which he replied, "that in a few (he hardly dared acknowledge how few) weeks, he must bid a long adieu to England; though, rather than return without her, he offered to send off a courier to Madrid, to request leave of his Majesty, that he might be permitted to decline accepting the distinguished post which he had so recently appointed him to fill."

But what female ever yet willingly relinquished sovereign power, particularly when she could enjoy it with the man whom she loved?—Our hero had therefore no very great difficulty in persuading her to wave a little female punctilio upon the present occasion; and, by the time they were summoned to dinner, her Ladyship had reduced her months to the singular number,

number, and even given her admirer reason to hope that she would still, if absolutely necessary, shorten his time of probation.

Mrs. Corbett did not put her niece to the blush by ill-timed congratulations; and, soon after they rose from table, the two Dukes set out upon their return to Mr. Fenwick's; the Marquis promising to follow them the next day, with Mrs. Corbett, and the young ladies: the former having readily accepted the invitation which common politeness obliged him to give her, as she longed to be present at the approaching wedding, and it was rather too long a ride or drive to her house from Mr. Fenwick's.

During their ride home, the uncle and nephew talked over every necessary arrangement to be taken in consequence of the mother's and son's nuptials, and came

to several decisive resolutions. While they were thus employed, the fair cousins were congratulating each other upon the termination of their suspense, though they both sincerely regretted their approaching separation; Lady Ossulston agreeing that she had the least right to repine, and hoping that she should soon hear of her cousin having met with an admirer more to her taste than Colonel Milford had ever been.

Mrs. Corbett, no longer restrained by the presence of the strangers, gave a loose to her joy; "hoping, since her dear niece had paid her so short a visit, that she would spend at least a couple of nights with her before she left England, most likely for ever."

Lady Ossulston gaily observed, "it was all in good time to revert to such a melancholy theme. Besides, admitting that

that she was doomed to reside abroad, surely her uncle and cousin would pay her one visit."

"I promise you a very long one, my dear Eudora," replied the Marquis, "when, tired of playing the Monarch, your *caro sposo* condescends to content himself with his Dukedom, and to reside in Spain, where he means, he assures me, to end his days."

"Then I must wait with patience, till we both grow grey-headed, I am of opinion. I already see you, uncle, tottering under a patriarch's years, coming to welcome our return; and Fanny here, leaning on her grandson, in the background! What introductions there will be! for I shall bring all my family home with me, and, while leaning on my short crook stick (I will not have a long one, that I may not resemble Mrs. Hesham), I shall animadvert upon their merits, though perhaps in a feeble tone, and with a shaking head. Then you, Fanny, will

assume your spectacles, to admire the beauty of my great grandchild, suppose; whom you will pronounce to be my very image. Oh, I have the whole group in my mind's eye!"

Thus did Lady Ossulston convince her uncle and cousin, how truly happy she felt. Nor were Mrs. Ashby and Mr. Fenwick less so, when they learned that Ferdinand's offers had been very graciously accepted. The latter prognosticated that they would be as happy as the late Lord Lyttleton represented himself and his wife to have been; bestowing some very merited encomiums upon her Ladyship, whose absence he was afraid would have been severely felt by all her dependants and poorer neighbours, if Mrs. Ashby had not been coming to supply her place; by which means, though they might regret, they would not miss, their former benefactress.

CHAP. XII.

AS neither the brides nor bridegrooms elect wished to render their approaching nuptials the talk of the country, they agreed to keep every thing as secret as possible till the day which was to unite their destinies, when Lord Stanmore vowed he would give all his tenants and neighbours reason to remember his niece's wedding, as he was resolved to keep open house, for three days at least, for both great and small; and Mr. Fenwick declared the same hospitable intentions,

 though

though he presumed that there were people who would attribute his marrying in his old age, to his late success having deranged his intellects: while Mrs. Ashby protested that if she remained any longer his inmate, she should indubitably set Mrs. Hesham a prating; therefore proposed returning home the next day.

To this both her admirer and son objected; though they agreed to her taking up her abode at Lady Ossulston's, till the celebration of the weddings, which would render her son's visits to that lady much less liable to be remarked: and, as Mr. Fenwick was in the habit of paying his respects daily to her Ladyship, he should excite no surprise. With him, therefore, the Duke de L'Infantado remained, while our hero and his suite once more returned to Wildham's, whom he conceived he could never repay for his former attention towards his mother.

The

The Marquis's lawyers were set to work as soon as possible, and both the Dukes were eager to convince Mr. Fenwick, that, had he been merely actuated by interested motives, he could not have made a better choice. To Wildham our hero was perfectly unreserved, as he was to take upon himself the management of Lady Ossulston's landed property, and to reside at her seat, which was to be held sacred for any son that she might have, who should prefer living in England to residing abroad; or in case any of her daughters married Englishmen. Catherine was, if she chose, to continue to keep his house, and to superintend those domestics which it would be necessary to retain; but this was left entirely to her option, as our hero rendered her completely independent, sincerely wishing that she might meet with some worthy man likely to make her amends for the attachment which she had ever evinced for his mother.

 Wildham,

Wildham, though he regretted the loss of Mrs. Ashby's society, sincerely rejoiced that her merits and patient sufferings were likely to be so amply rewarded; and Catherine promised never to leave him, while her services contributed to his comfort. The good old man had had, for some time, a plan in embryo to punish his officious opposite neighbour, and he was very anxious to prevent her suspecting the approaching marriages. This he thought could only be done by affording her some more amusing occupation than prying into what did not concern her; still he had his doubts, whether he should ever bring matters to bear: yet our hero's domestic arrangements, with which he was made acquainted, appeared likely to facilitate his measures, if he could but prevail upon *Don* Gonsalvo to act the part he had allotted him in the proposed farce, of which he had already laid the foundation.

Gonsalvo was a droll, well-informed, humorous young fellow, exactly what Wildham remembered to have been himself at six-and-twenty. Without, therefore, betraying the confidence of his young friend, as he knew Gonsalvo was sufficiently in his master's good graces, not to be absolutely ignorant of what was going forward, particularly of those arrangements in which he was concerned, he began to sound him at a distance; and the first opportunity that offered, he led more directly to the subject, which (so much did it tickle his fancy) might be said to be nearest his heart. Gonsalvo was scarcely less delighted with the idea; "but then, might not his undertaking to second his schemes, displease his Grace?"

Wildham promised to sound our hero upon the subject; and that very evening he seized so favourable an opportunity, knowing the Duke was by no means an enemy to any innocent prank, that,

having prefaced his tale by declaring "he should not die easy, except he was revenged of his greatest torment, Mrs. Hesham," he succeeded in making his Grace laugh at the idea, and even led him to agree that she richly deserved to be mortified, for having made it her study through life to promote mischief.

The old man required no more, but instantly began his plan of attack: our readers will therefore suffer us to pass over another nine days, during which our hero had been a resident at Mr. Wildham's, though he spent the greatest part of his time at Ossulston House, where Mr. Fenwick was also a daily visitor:—still no suspicions were entertained of their either of them having it in contemplation to alter their condition, as Mrs. Hesham, who was the only person likely to have troubled her head about them, or to have circulated any reports respecting them, was too much occupied by her own concerns,

concerns, even to remark that his Grace was very seldom at home. But on the tenth morning, another bustle occurred in the ancient borough of —— ! Mrs. Hesham had been seen dressed in a different style from what she had ever hitherto been, looking out of her window from a little before nine: her neighbours, on every side, had therefore wondered, during their breakfast, "what expedition the old gossip had in view!"

Before ten, the Duke, as usual, set off on horseback, to pay his diurnal visit, and in a few minutes afterwards, a postchaise drove up to Mr. Wildham's door, into which the Duke's servants, assisted by the postillion and hostler, put a great deal of baggage; and, finally, a couple of very handsome trunks were strapped on before. Had it been his Grace's own carriage, the neighbours would have concluded that he was going to take his final leave of —— ; but it was only a hack chaise, from the

inn where his carriages and horses stood: and, at the expiration of a few minutes, Gonsalvo, attended by Wildham, Catherine, and the other servant out of livery, came to the door, when, having shaken hands with them all three, and bowed to Mrs. Hesham, who was still at her open window, and who very politely returned his salute, he jumped into the chaise, which immediately drove off, taking the London road out of the town.

As many people were assembled to see him depart, every one of whom had something to say both in his and his master's praise, some of them remarked that "Mrs. Hesham was not often so condescending; but they supposed she hoped her civility would be reported to the Duke." The chaise was, however, scarcely out of sight, before the old lady sallied forth, dressed in a new silk gown, and every thing else of a piece; nor did her favourite crook disgrace her elegant toilet. Had she had

a vote

a vote for the borough, her neighbours would, as they observed, have been less astonished, as they should then have attributed her improved appearance to the magic power of Colonel Milford's guineas: as it was, they did not know what to think, except that times were (with her) greatly altered for the better. She was, nevertheless, suffered to pursue her walk; it being presumed that she was going to inform her friends that the valet, if not the master, had left ——, as she bent her steps towards the Mayor's: and there, certainly she paid her first visit; but, in less than five minutes, she once more sallied forth, and turning down a private street, soon reached the principal Church, which she entered by a small door, that appeared to have been left open for her accommodation, and which was immediately closed after her.

She was not, however, fortunate enough to slip in unperceived; that being no part

of

of Wildham's plan, who had, on the contrary, set Captain Munford and several more to watch her. She was therefore no sooner within the Church, than the well-instructed and highly amused Captain declared his belief, "that somebody was going to smuggle a wedding, and that Mrs. Hesham was in the secret!"

Such an idea having soon got wind, in less than five minutes there was a large crowd assembled, all equally curious and equally ignorant of what they had been brought to see. For a few seconds they were kept in suspense, when Mrs. Burton made her appearance, and was evidently surprised when she found the Church in a manner surrounded. She was not, however, sufficiently alarmed, to endeavour to make her retreat, though she made for the private door by which Mrs. Hesham had been admitted, which was opened for her, and, regardless of all opposition, the crowd rushed in after her, till the Church

was

was as full as it had ever been on a Sunday for years; but, to their no small surprise and disappointment, they saw no one but Mrs. Hesham, Mrs Burton, and the Clerk, standing near the altar, and all three anxiously looking towards the door, which it was useless to think of shutting. In vain did Mrs. Hesham declare "they might be ashamed of their behaviour!" not one was seen to blush, nor endeavouring to make their retreat; merely replying to her continued remonstrances, by enquiring "who was going to be married?" She peremptorily refused to satisfy their impertinent curiosity; therefore, for nearly an hour, did they patiently wait "the upshot" (as Captain Munford termed it) of this strange business: when a man came running into the Church, and forced his way through the crowd, holding a letter, which he presented to Mrs. Hesham, who broke the seal tremblingly, and turned pale before she had read the first

line; her consternation increased as she proceeded, and she had no sooner concluded, than, bursting into tears of rage, she tore the fatal epistle into a thousand pieces!

The petrified Mrs. Burton requested to know what was the matter; but Mrs. Hesham's rage would have rendered her unintelligible, even had she been inclined to have satisfied her companion's curiosity: so, catching hold of her arm, she made a motion to leave the Church, when Captain Munford exclaimed—

"Why, heyday, neighbours! there don't seem as if there would be a wedding, after all! for hang me, if Madam Gossip did not think she was going to act the bride! I suppose whoever has made a fool of her, only wanted to see how silly she would make herself! Well, hang me, if it a'nt a d———d good joke!" bursting into a violent

violent fit of laughter, in which he was joined by every one present; some crying—

"Why, Dame Gossip, where is your crook?"

Others—"Aye, aye, as sure as fate, somebody has made a fool of the old woman! So, she wanted to appear young!"

"Lord, Lord!" cried a third, "that ever such an old scarecrow should have thought any man in earnest!"

These remarks, added to *the would-be bride's* furious looks, increased the general mirth; and both ladies were so pressed to explain, that they were not suffered to proceed, till Mrs. Burton had acknowledged that "Mrs. Hesham had been served a very dirty trick."

One "was very glad of it, for she had besmeared many a one with her foul mouth!"

A second

A second rejoiced that "the old gossip had afforded others of her trade so good a harvest!"

And a third "wished all such meddling, chattering old b——-s were served the same!"

A fourth, in conjunction with Munford, and a few more honest Tars, completely blocked up the door-way, "vowing they should not leave the Church till they knew who had played Mrs. Hesham this clever trick!'

In vain did Mrs. Burton threaten! The Mayor's authority was not even dreaded, and, bitter to relate, Mrs. Hesham was forced to acknowledge that "that vilest of all vile wretches, the Duke de Medina's valet, had induced her to render herself thus ridiculous."

The crowd being now perfectly satisfied, they suffered them to depart, but not in peace,

peace, for they made the air ring with their repeated huzzas, to which were added the bells, which, by Munford's desire, gave them a glorious dumb peal: therefore, in a few minutes, the news flew from one end of the town to the other, though it was some time before the real truth was generally known, as the crowd, who attended her to her own door (and she had some way to walk), replied to every enquiry of "What are the bells ringing for?" — "For Mrs. Hesham's wedding."

It may therefore be supposed what a charming mob were assembled by the time she did reach her own door; and, as she entered, they gave her three long and loud cheers.

Wildham and a few of his intimate friends were lying *perdue* at the latter's house, to see her return; and never were

they

they more completely gratified, nor more completely revenged of a person, who made no scruple of scandalizing even her best friends; and who had treated every one of those who rejoiced in her mortification, with a degree of insolence, that the contempt in which they held her, alone induced them to tolerate.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIII.

MRS. Burton could not, out of common decency, though most heartily ashamed, leave her immediately, notwithstanding she was all impatience to return home; having for once kept a secret from her husband—meaning to occasion him an agreeable surprise: indeed, Mrs. Hesham had made her take an oath to keep her secret, till the ceremony was over; and perhaps it was the only one that had ever been kept a week by either of the ladies! Therefore, anxious as Mrs. Burton was to return home, she was still more so to know

know the contents of the letter which had so cruelly overturned her dear friend's late plans. She was, however, obliged to make the frantic fury take some hartshorn, so much were her spirits exhausted, before she could obtain any information.

Had it been possible, enraged as was the spinster, she would have concealed her bitter disappointment; but that was now impracticable: she therefore foresaw that she should not be able to stir out for a month! and even then, that she should be the general laughing-stock for the remainder of her life. Had it been in her power, she would probably, in consequence of these reflections, have followed her *base* admirer's example, and have left the town in a rage. At last, after repeatedly vowing that she would be revenged upon the villain, if there were either law or equity in England, she recapitulated the contents of the note, which had overthrown all her visionary

plans

plans of future happiness. We mean, however, to enter into a few subsequent details, to render her rage rather more intelligible to our readers.

Mr. Wildham, having made her firmly believe that Gonsalvo was a man of very great birth, and that he professed the greatest esteem for her, when in fact he held her, if possible, in more sovereign contempt than did Wildham, never having been able to forgive her abominable insolence towards his master, which had, of course, come to his ears: besides, her general character was sufficient to warrant his frequently wishing that he could render her as much the town-talk as she contrived to make other people, by her gossipping and tale-bearing; of course, he listened with avidity to any scheme likely to render her completely ridiculous. Wildham repeated to him all he had said respecting his family, &c. desiring him to confirm all that he had advanced, with

suitable

suitable additions, which he readily did during a few *tête-à-têtes*; and, as the old woman was for ever at her window, from the time of his return to ——, and he had, owing to his master's continual visits at Ossulston House, a great deal of leisure time, he was never at a loss for an opportunity to enter into conversation with her, and very successfully improved upon Wildham's improbable story, declaring, "he believed he should die a bachelor, as he had made a vow never to marry but a lady of equally good family, and there was very little hope of any one of that description accepting of his homage, as he had little or no fortune: besides, his situation in the Duke de Medina's household might induce many women to scorn his offers."

Thus did he run on, protesting, "that, poor as he was, money would be no object to him, family being all he required," till the *amiable kind-hearted* spinster resolved

to

to strike while the iron was hot; gave him fully to understand that she should not prove inexorable, were he to presume to look up to her—boasting of what she never had, nor never would possess, Wildham vowed, when Gonsalvo told him how nicely she nibbled at the bait. This rendered the valet much less scrupulous; though he found he should be pressed for time, as his master, he knew, had it in contemplation to send him off to London, to give various orders respecting carriages, &c. whence he was to proceed with dispatches to Madrid, where he was to make every necessary arrangement, previous to the Duke's return to Mexico; the other valet being less intelligent, or not so great a favourite. He was, therefore, obliged to take his measures accordingly; and the old gentleman, having sounded the Duke, though he by no means gave him to understand the extent of their plan, and found he had no very serious objection to their prosecuting their

scheme of revenge, they proceeded with less restraint than ever: Gonsalvo commenting with well-feigned gravity to his inamorata upon the importance of the business he was going to execute for his Grace at Madrid; it therefore became necessary that she should immediately decide, whether she would accompany him, or whether she would doom him to a life of celibacy.

His dulcinea was much too obliging, to require such a proof of his regard; agreeing, even more readily than the fair widow had done, to accompany him to the world's end: but, like him, she was anxious to keep their intentions a secret till she came forth a blooming bride, upon which occasion she hinted a few new clothes would be required, which ought to be in readiness prior to the happy day, particularly the wedding suit.

The lover requested that all those

matters might be left to him, only desiring that she would give him her orders, which he would undertake to have executed with the greatest privacy; as he should give out that they were clothes which he was going to take to Spain for an English lady resident there.

She approved of the plan; but gave a delicate hint respecting cash, which shocked her *disinterested* admirer, who even offered to supply her with twenty pounds for immediate use. She accepted ten, and suffered him to take her best gown, to have the wedding suit made by; as he had advised, upon reflection, her not making any more purchases at ——, as she could be so much better and fashionably supplied in London.

Wildham had insisted upon paying for the fun, and orders were given in consequence, for the smart dress, which had

so much astonished the spinster's neighbours; and which, when conveyed to her by her supposed lover, convinced her that he was as much in earnest as she could wish: and, to keep up the farce, Wildham gave him a deed upon parchment, resembling a licence, which he was to afford her a glimpse of, the evening previous to the wedding; it not being supposed, that she would require to inspect it very narrowly.

The time for his departure having been fixed by his master, he pointed out to her how they might manage matters, without giving any one reason to suspect their intentions; he was not even to tell the Clergyman who the lady was, till the very last moment, for fear that he should be indiscreet. Mrs. Hesham enjoyed the surprise that she had in store for the Divine, with whom she knew she was no favourite. The best part of her clothes, though

though they went into a very narrow compass, were smuggled over to Wildham's, that they might be packed up with those of her future husband; and what she left behind, were to be bestowed upon Betty Thompson. But this was to be done by letter; and in the same manner it was resolved that she should take leave of all her friends, or, more properly, acquaintance. A circular letter was therefore penned by the delighted fair one, and committed to the charge of Mrs. Burton, who alone was in all her secrets: and when the bridegroom stepped into the post-chaise, the bride was to repair to Church with all possible privacy; and he was to stop the carriage at the town's end, under pretence of having forgotten something, which would enable him to return, and give her the meeting at the altar.

But, alas! the wicked *Don*, as is already known, played her false, and, instead of

coming, sent the letter, which so effectually crushed her aspiring hopes; as he wrote, that he was sorry to inform her he had changed his mind since they parted, his conscience not permitting him to marry a heretic: he therefore requested her acceptance of the bridal suit, and the money he had advanced her, as a small atonement for his caprice: adding, that he had left her clothes at Mr. Wildham's, under the care of Miss Ashby, who, he made no doubt, would deliver them, when required.

And this the old gossip repeated to Mrs. Burton, who, like every one else, told her, she had been rightly served, and then hastened home, to amuse her husband, at the silly dupe's expence, who had no redress. First, Gonsalvo had left —— for ever: and, besides, he had taken care never to have any witnesses of their conversation: nay, could she have proved

any

any thing against him, she had no money to carry on a prosecution, and none of her acquantance she knew would support her.

Wildham affected to be as much astonished as every body else really was, at her having allowed herself to be so grossly duped ; and Catherine supposed that the bundle entrusted to her care, was a present which Mr. Gonsalvo meant to make Mrs. Hesham. All her threats therefore evaporated in smoke; and, like our hero's arrival, return, &c. her mortification proved only a *Nine Days' Wonder.*

CHAP.

CHAP. XIV.

AND on the ninth day after Mrs. Hesham's woful disappointment, our hero and Mr. Fenwick were united to their respective brides, at the same Church where she had experienced so severe a mortification.

The feelings of the crowd assembled upon this occasion, were very different from those which they experienced when they were convinced that the object of their general aversion (for such was Mrs. Margaret Hesham) had been purposely exposed

to

to their ridicule: for now they rent the air with acclamations of joy; Captain Munford and John Glenton taking the lead, and calling down the choicest blessings upon the heads of each couple.

A thousand pounds were distributed among the poorer inhabitants; and Lady Ossulston, or rather the Duchess de Medina, presented the Corporation with the title-deeds of a small estate, the produce of which was annually to portion a freeman's daughter, of irreproachable morals and character.

What more remains to be said?—That neither couple ever repented having parted with their liberty in favour of each other; and that, though almost immediately separated from her family and friends, the Duchess found no reason to repine at having followed her Lord to South America, where they remained till the death of the Duke de L'Infantado recalled them

to Europe, where they then fixed their abode; our hero having succeeded his uncle as Prime Minister.

Fanny Deloraine soon married a very amiable man, and succeeded, owing to her cousin's generosity, to the principal part of Lord Stanmore's fortune: while Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick, blessed in each other, and by all around them, were not called upon to reap the fruit of their virtues, till a son of Lady Ossulston had become their neighbour, and who, in common with her other children, shared their fortune at their death.

As for Mrs. Hesham, unable to stir without being assailed by impertinent questions, for a time she found herself uncomfortable; but soon braving her tormentors, she continued to gossip, till death effectually stopped her mouth.

Wildham lived to a good old age at

Ossulston

Ossulston House, which Catherine managed even for the Duchess's son, never having chosen to marry.

Milford's latter days were more prosperous than his early ones. His son did not long survive his exile; and having adopted a distant relation, he died, generally respected and lamented, and was succeeded by a young man, much more likely to do honour to his fortune, than ever Colonel Milford had been.

And thus concludes our *Nine Days' Wonder*; which, if it do but preserve our readers from *nine hours' ennui*, we may (though but young candidates for their favour), at some future period, again appeal to their indulgence.

FINIS.

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